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JOSEPH II.
AND HIS COURT.

BY L. MÜHLBACH.

From the German,
BY ADELAIDE De V. CHAUDRON.

VOLUME II.

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S. H. GOETZEL, PUBLISHER.

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In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Alabama,
for the Confederate States of America.

Farrow & Dennett, printers.

JOSEPH II. AND HIS COURT.

CHAPTER I.

THE DINNER AT THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S.

PRINCE KAUNITZ sat lazily reclining in his arm chair, playing with his jewelled snuff-box and listening with an appearance of unconcern to a man who, in an attitude of profoundest respect, stood before the Prince and related to him a remarkable story of a young Emperor and beautiful peasant-girl, in which there was much talk of woods, diamonds, milk and an Arabian steed.

The smile that was upon the face of the Minister might rather betoken amusement or incredulity.

The detective was at that period of his story where the Emperor parted from old Conrad and his daughters. He now paused to see the effect of his narration.

"Very pretty, indeed," said the Prince, nodding his head, "but romances are out of fashion. In these days, we prefer truth."

"Does your Highness suppose that I am not speaking truth?" said the man.

Kaunitz took a pinch of snuff, and replied coldly, "I suppose nothing about it. Somebody, I know, has been playing upon your love of the marvellous—I know that you are not telling me the truth."

"Your Highness!" exclaimed Eberhard, with the air of an injured man, "no one can impose upon my credulity, for I believe nothing but that which I see. I had this adventure from old Conrad himself, and I saw him receive a thousand ducats for the horse. In the joy of his foolish old heart, he told me the whole story, and as he saw the deep interest which I felt in the tale, he invited me to his house, where I saw the beautiful Marianne with her diamond on her finger."

—"Then you acted like a fool, for the Emperor knows you as well as all Vienna does, and he will be furious when he discovers that we have been watching his pastoral amours."

"Indeed, your Highness is right, I would be a poor fool to go there without great precaution; for, as you very justly remarked, I am well known in Vienna. But when I made the old peasant's acquaintance I was disguised, and I defy anybody to know me when I choose to play

incognito. I wore a gray wig and a black patch over one eye. In this dress I visited them, and had the story all over again, with variations, from that coquettish village beauty, Kathi."

—"How long ago?"

—"Three weeks, your Highness."

—"How many times since then has the Emperor visited his *inamorata*?"

"Six times, your Highness. Old Conrad has bought a farm, where he lives in a handsome house, in which each of his daughters now has a room of her own. Marianne's room opens on the garden, where the Emperor drinks his milk and enjoys the privilege of her society."

—"Have the girls any lovers?"

—"Of course, your Highness, but they have grown so proud that Kathi will have nothing to say to her sweetheart, Valentine; while Marianne, it is said, has never encouraged any of the young men in the village—Indeed, they are all afraid of her."

—"Because they know that the Emperor honors her with his presence."

"No, your Highness, the Emperor has not allowed the family to whisper a word of his agency in their newly-gotten wealth. They give out that it is a legacy."

"Do the Emperor and Marianne see one another in secret, without the curate and the father's knowledge?"

Eberhard shrugged his shoulders. "Day before yesterday, Marianne went alone to the woods to gather mushrooms, and never came home until dusk. She had been lost in the woods. It was the day on which the Emperor was to visit the farm, but he did not come. Perhaps he got lost, too. To-morrow, Marianne is again to gather mushrooms—I, too, shall go—to cut wood."

"Is that all?" asked Kaunitz.

"That is all, for to-day, your Highness."

"Very well. Go home and invent a continuation of your story. Let no one know of it meanwhile except myself. You can boast of more than some poets and *literati* can say, for you have amused me, and I will reward you. Here are two gold ducats for you."

Eberhard bowed low as he received them, but when he had left the room, and was out of sight of Kaunitz, he turned towards the door muttering, "As if I were such a fool as to sell my precious secret to you for two paltry ducats! I know of others who will pay me for my news, and they shall have it."

Meanwhile, Kaunitz, buried in his arm-chair, was revolving the story in his mind.

"An Emperor, a widower of two wives," said he to himself, "and he treats us to an idyl of the genuine Gessner stamp! An imperial Damon who spends his time turning wreaths of roses with his Phillis! Well—he had better be left to play the fool in peace; his Pastoral will keep him from meddling in state affairs. Men call me the coachman of European politics; so be it, and let no one meddle with my reins.

That noble Empress is of one mind with me, but this Emperor would like to snatch the reins, and go careering over the heavens for himself. So much the better if he flirts and drinks milk with a dairy-maid. But how long will it last? Eberhard, of course, has gone to Porhammer, who being piously disinclined to such little pastimes, will go straight to the Empress; and then Damon will be reprov'd and I—I may fall under her displeasure for having known and concealed her son's intrigue. What shall I do? Shall I warn the Emperor so that he can carry off his Semele, and go off with his amours? Or shall I—Bah! Let things shape themselves. What do I care for them all! I am the coachman of Europe—and they are my passengers."

So saying, Kaunitz threw back his head, and being alone, he indulged himself in a chuckle. It was speedily smothered however, for three taps at the door announced the approach of the Minister's valet.

"The fool intends to remind me that it is time to dress," said he to himself. "There must be some important engagement on hand to make him so audacious. Come in, Hippolyte!"

"Any engagement for dinner!" asked he, as Hippolyte made his appearance.

—"So, please your Highness, you dine to-day with the French Ambassador."

—"What o'clock is it?"

—"Three o'clock, your Highness."

—"It is time. Tell the cook to send my dinner to the palace of the French Ambassador. His Excellency knows the terms on which I dine out of my own house?"

"I had the honor to explain them fully, your Highness."

"And he acceded to them?"

"He did, your Highness. Your Highness, he said, was welcome to bring your dinner, if you preferred it to his. He had one request, however, to make, which was that you would not bring your post-dessert, a request which I did not understand."

"I understand it perfectly. The Count de Breteuil means that he would like me to leave my mouth-cleaning apparatus at home. Come, since it is time, let us begin to dress."

So saying, he rose, and presently he was walking to and fro in the powder-room, buried in his white mantle, while the servants waved their powder-brushes, and the air was dense with white clouds.

"Order the carriage," said the Prince, when Hippolyte had presented the snuff-box and the handkerchief of cobweb cambric and lace. "Three footmen to stand behind my chair."

Hippolyte went to order the footmen to the hotel of the Count de Breteuil, while his master slowly made his way to the ante-room where six lackeys awaited him, each one bearing aloft a long silk cloak.

"What says the thermometer to-day?" asked he.

The lackey with the first cloak stepped to a window and examined the thermometer that was fastened outside.

"Twelve degrees, your Highness—temperate," said the man.

"Cold! Four cloaks," said Kaunitz; and stepping through the row of servants, one after the other laid cloak upon cloak over his shoulders. When the fourth one had been wrapped around him, he ordered a fifth for his return, and putting his handkerchief to his mouth for fear he might swallow a breath of air, the coachman of Europe proceeded to his carriage, where Hippolyte was ready to help him in.

"Is my mouth-cleaning apparatus in the rumble?" asked the Prince, as he sank back in the soft cushions.

"Your Highness said that his Excellency had requested——"

"Yes, but I did not say that I should heed his Excellency's requests. Quick and bring it hither! Cups, brushes, essences, and everything!"

Off started Hippolyte, and Kaunitz drew his four cloaks around his precious person while he muttered to himself, "I shall show my lord, Count de Breteuil, that the man who has the honor of receiving Kaunitz at his table, makes no conditions with such a guest. The French Ambassador grows arrogant, and I must teach him that rules of etiquette and customs of society are for him and his compeers, but not for me. Whatever Kaunitz does is becoming and *en règle*—*Voilà tout*—Forwards!"

Meanwhile the Count de Breteuil was receiving his distinguished guests. After the topics of the day had been discussed, he informed them that he was glad to be able to promise that Prince Kaunitz would come to dinner *without* his abominable apparatus.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the ladies.

"Not at all," replied the Count. "I have complied with one of his absurd conditions—he brings his dinner; but I made it my especial request that he would omit his usual post-dessert."

"And he agreed?"

"It would appear so, since he has accepted. It must be so, for see, he is here."

The Count went forward to meet the Prince, who deigned not the smallest apology for having kept the guests waiting a whole hour.

They repaired to the dining-room, where a costly and luxurious dinner made amends to the company for their protracted fast.

Kaunitz, however, took no notice of these delicate viands. He ate his own dinner, and was served by his own lackeys.

"Your Highness," said his neighbor, the Princess Estethazy, "you should taste this *Pâté à la Soubis*, it is delicious."

"Who knows what abominable ingredients may not have gone into its composition," said Kaunitz. "I might poison myself if I tasted the villainous compound. It is all very well for ordinary people to eat from other men's kitchens; if they die, the ranks close up and nobody misses them; but I owe my life to Austria and to Europe. Eat your *pâté à la Soubise* if it suit you, I eat nothing but viands *à la Kaunitz*, and I trust to no cook but my own."

It was the same with the Tokay, the Jobannisberg and the Champagne.

Kaunitz affected not to see them, while one of his lackeys reached him a glass of water on a golden salver. Kaunitz held it up to the light. "How dare you bring me water from the Count's fountain," said he, with a threatening look.

"Indeed, your Highness," stammered the frightened servant, "I drew it myself from your Highness's own fountain."

"How," laughed the Princess Esterhazy, "you bring your water, too?"

"Yes, madam, I do, for it is the purest water in Vienna, and I have already told you that my health is of the first importance to Austria. Bread, Baptiste!"

Baptiste was behind the chair, with a golden plate, on which lay two or three slices of bread, which he presented.

"And bread, too, from his house," cried the Princess, laughing immoderately.

"Yes, madam, replied Kaunitz gravely, "I eat no bread but that of my own baker."

"Oh," replied the gay young Princess, "I am not surprised at your taking such wondrous good care of yourself; what astonishes me is, that you should be allowed to enjoy such privileges in a house that is not your own. Why Louis XIV could not have been more exacting when he condescended to dine with a subject!"

Kaunitz raised his cold blue eyes so as to meet the look of the bold speaker. "Madam," said he, "Louis XIV was Louis XIV and I am Kaunitz."

So saying, he took a glass of water from *his* fountain, and ate a piece of bread from *his* baker. He then leaned back in his chair and took an animated part in the conversation. This was only because thereby he knew that he would dazzle his hearers by speaking English, French, Italian, or Spanish, as occasion required.

The dinner was at an end, and dessert came on the table. Of course Kaunitz refused to partake of it; but while the other guests were enjoying their confections, he took advantage of a pause in the conversation, to say to his pretty neighbor,

"Now, Princess, that the company have enjoyed *their* dessert, I will take the liberty of ordering *mine*."

—"Ah! you have your own dessert?" asked the Princess, while the guests listened to hear what was coming.

"I have," said Kaunitz. "I have brought my dessert of course. Hippolyte, my *étui*."

Hippolyte brought the offensive *étui* and laid it on the dinner-table, while Baptiste approached with a glass of water. Kaunitz opened the case with quiet indifference and examined its contents. There were several small mirrors, various kinds of brushes, scissors, knives, a whet stone, and a pile of little linen napkins.*

While Kaunitz examined and took out his disgusting little utensils, the ladies looked at Count Breteuil, who could scarcely credit the evi-

dence of his senses. But as Kaunitz set a looking-glass before him, he raised his upper lip, and closed his teeth, preparatory to a cleaning, the Count rose indignant from his seat.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "we will return to the drawing-room for coffee, Prince Kaunitz desires *this* room to himself."

The company departed, leaving Kaunitz alone. He did not look as if he had heard or seen anything. He went on grinning, brushing his teeth, drying them in and out with his napkins, and finished off with washing his hands and cleaning his nails. This done, he walked deliberately back to the drawing-room, and, going immediately towards the host, he said,

"Count, I am about to return home. You have taken very great pains to prepare a dinner for me, and I shall make you a princely return. From this day forward, I dine no more from home; *your* dinner, therefore, will be immortal, for history will relate that the last time Prince Kaunitz dined away from his own palace, he dined at that of the French Ambassador."

With this he bowed, and slowly left the room.

CHAPTER II.

MARIANNE'S DISAPPEARANCE.

Kaunitz remained true to his policy, in the drama of "The Emperor and the Dairy-Maid." He allowed things to run their course. Twice a week Eberhard came with additional information, to which the Minister listened with deep interest, but his interest never took the shape of action. What did *he* care.

"This imperial idyl is a disease," thought he. "It will have its crisis by and by, like a cutaneous eruption. Let it come. Why should I help the patient when I have not been called in?"

Not long after, however, he *was* called in. One morning he was laying, in his dressing-gown, on a divan, his head bound up in half a dozen silk handkerchiefs, and his whole person in the primeval disorder of a slovenly *négligé*, when his valet announced—the Emperor Joseph.

Kaunitz half rose, saying with a yawn, "Show his Majesty to the State Reception-Room, and beg him to await me there."

"I have no time to wait, my dear Prince," said a soft and melancholy voice behind him; and, as Kaunitz turned around, he saw the Emperor who was already at his side.

The Prince motioned to Hippolyte to leave the room. He went out

on tip-toe, and, as he reached the threshold, the Emperor himself, closed the door and locked it. Kaunitz, who had risen, stood in the middle of the room, looking as indifferent to the visit of an Emperor as to that of a tailor.

"Prince," said Joseph, returning and offering his hand, "we have not hitherto been good friends, but you see that I hold you in esteem, for came to claim your assistance."

"I expected your Majesty," replied Kaunitz.

The Emperor cast his eyes over the velvet dressing-gown and the half dozen head-handkerchiefs, and looked his astonishment. The Prince understood the glance and replied to it.

"I did not expect your Majesty quite so soon. A few hours later I would have been ready to receive you. Will you permit me to retire for a few moments, that I may at least make my head, if not the rest of my person, presentable?"

The Emperor took the hand of the Prince and led him back to the divan. "My dear Kaunitz," said he, "when a man's head is in such a maze as mine to-day, he concerns himself very little about the looks of other men. Sit down again, and I will take this arm-chair by you."

He drew Kaunitz, with gentle force, down upon the divan and then seated himself at his side.

"Do you know what brings me to you," said Joseph, blushing.

"I believe that I do, your Majesty. It is no State affair, for on State affairs, unhappily, we are ever at variance.

The Emperor laughed a sardonic laugh. "What need have I of a State Counsellor. I, who am but a puppet in the hands of my mother? I, who must stand, with shackled arms, and look on, while she reigns! But it is vain to murmur. I watch and wait; and while I wait, I find myself inclining fast to *your* policy. I believe you to be an honorable Statesman, and I believe also, that the course you have pursued you have chosen because you are convinced that it is wise."

"Your Majesty means the French alliance," said Kaunitz.

"You, like your deceased father, have always opposed it, and but for the firmness and wisdom of the Empress, it would have failed. But we need not discuss this matter to-day; I owe the honor conferred upon me to another question."

"Then you know why I am here?"

"I believe that I know," replied Kaunitz, playing with the silk tassels of his dressing-gown. "I have lately heard a tale about an Emperor, who was lost in a forest and rescued by a peasant girl. The Sovereign was grateful, as a matter of course, and the damsel forthwith melted away with love at the sight of him, as Semele did for Jupiter—that, too, may be very natural; but let me tell your Majesty, it is dangerous, for the committee on morals do not approve of such pastorals, and the Empress——"

"That accursed committee," cried Joseph. "It is they who discovered it, and you who betrayed me."

Kaunitz slightly elevated his shoulders, and his eyes rested, unmoved, upon the Emperor's glowing face. "I have never yet," said he, "descended to the office of an informer. Had your Majesty addressed me on this subject some weeks ago, I should have said to your Majesty, 'you are dreaming a very pretty dream of innocence, moonshine, and childishness. If you do not wish to be roughly awakened go and dream at a distance from Vienna, for here there are certainly some people who will think it their duty to disturb you!'"

—"Why did you not warn me, Kaunitz?"

—"I did not wish to have the appearance of forcing myself into your Majesty's confidence—I had not been entrusted with your secret, and had no right to warn you."

"No, you warned the Empress instead," said Joseph, bitterly.

—"I warned nobody, your Majesty. I said to myself, 'He is an enviable man, to be able, in the midst of an artificial life, to enjoy the sweets of rural intercourse.' I foresaw what must inevitably happen, and pitied the innocent Eve, who will, ere long, be exiled from paradise."

"She is exiled!" cried the Emperor. "She has been removed—I know not where. She has disappeared, and no trace of her can I find."

"Disappeared," exclaimed Kaunitz, astonished. "Then I have not heard the whole truth. I did not even know that she was to be removed. I only suspected it."

"Tell me truth!" cried the Emperor, sharply.

"Sire," said Kaunitz, proudly, "there may be circumstances when it is the part of wisdom to be silent, but it is never permitted to a man of honor to be untruthful. I know nothing of this girl's disappearance.—The most that I anticipated was a forced marriage. This, I knew, would occasion new differences between the Empress and your Majesty, and, I had supposed, that you were coming to me to call for my mediation."

"I must believe you," sighed the Emperor. "But prove your integrity by helping me to find her. Oh! Kaunitz, I beseech of you help me, and earn thereby my gratitude and my undying regard!"

"Have I waited so long for your Majesty's regard to earn it on account of a silly peasant?" said Kaunitz with a bitter smile. "I hope that I shall have a niche in the temple of the world's esteem, even if I do fail in finding the daughter of Conrad, the boor. If your Majesty has never esteemed me before you will not begin to do so to-day, and as regards your promised gratitude, the whole world knows, and your Majesty, also, knows, that I am not to be bribed; but I am ready, from the depths of my own attachment to you, to do all that I can to help you."

"Kaunitz," said the Emperor, offering him his hand, "I see that you intend to force me to love you."

"If I ever did force your Majesty to love me," replied Kaunitz, with animation, "I should count it the happiest day of my life. If I ever succeed in winning your confidence, then I may hope to complete the work I have begun—that of uniting your Majesty's dominions into

one great whole, before which all Europe shall bow in reverence."

"Let us speak of other things," interrupted the Emperor. "Help me to find Marianne."

—"Allow me one question then,—am I the only person to whom your Majesty has spoken on this subject?"

—"No,—I have spoken to one other man. I have consulted the shrewdest detective in all Vienna, and have promised him a large reward if he will serve me. He came to me this morning. He had discovered nothing, but gave me to understand that it was you who had betrayed me to the Empress."

"What is his name, your Majesty?"

—"Eberhard—He has sworn to unravel the mystery for me."

—"Then it will certainly be unravelled, for he it is who has been tracking your Majesty, and who has been the means of betraying you to the Empress. I, too, have been giving him gold; with this difference that your Majesty trusted him and I did not. He is at the bottom of the whole plot."

The Emperor sprang from his seat and hastened to the door. Kaunitz followed and ventured to detain him.

"I must go," cried Joseph impatiently, "I must force Eberhard to tell me what has been done with Marianne."

—"You will not find him. He, too, has disappeared."

—"Then I must go to the Empress to beg her to be merciful to that poor child, who is suffering on my account. I will exact it of her."

"That will only make the matter worse."

Joseph stamped his foot, and uttered a cry of fury.

—"What must I do, then," exclaimed he.

—"Be silent and affect indifference. When the Empress believes that you have grown careless on the girl's account, she will begin to think that she has taken the matter too seriously to heart. Conrad must sell his farm and remove far away from Vienna. Once settled, let *him* come and claim his daughter, and the Empress will be very glad to be rid of her. Do this, and all will be right."

Joseph frowned and seemed reluctant to follow this advice. Kaunitz saw his unwillingness and continued,

"This is the only means to restore the girl to peace of mind, and your Majesty owes her this reparation. The poor girl has been rudely precipitated from the clouds, and as the comedy is over, the best thing we can do for her, is to convince her that it *is* a comedy, and that the curtain has fallen. Your Majesty, however, must not again lay your imperial hand upon the simple web of her destiny; leave it to your inferiors to gather up its broken threads. Go away from Vienna; travel and seek recreation. Leave Marianne to me, and I swear to you that I will rescue and befriend her. When you have gone, I will go to the Empress and relate the whole story. I will tell her the truth: Maria Theresa has a noble, generous heart, and she will not do an injury to the one who was instrumental in saving the life of her darling son. She

will do anything for her happiness, provided it do not compromise the honor of her imperial house. And she is right. But you must go—and once gone, Marianne shall be free.”

“Free not only from others, but from me also,” said the Emperor, deeply affected. “I feel that I have erred towards this innocent young girl. I have deeply sinned, for regardless of her peace of mind, I have allowed myself to dream of a love that could bring naught but misery to both. For I will not conceal from you, my friend, how much it costs me to renounce this sweet creature, and to promise that I will see her no more. My intercourse with her was the last dying sigh of a love which has gone from my heart forevermore. But—it must be sacrificed; rescue her, and try to make her happy, Kaunitz; try to efface from her heart the memory of my blasting love.”

—“I promise to free her, but I cannot promise to rescue her from the memory of your Majesty’s love. Who knows that from the ring which she has sworn to wear forever, she may not have inhaled a poison that will shorten her young life? To rescue her from such a fate lies not in the power of man. Time—the great comforter, may heal her wounds, but your Majesty must promise never to ask whither she has gone. For you, she must be dead.”

“I promise, on my imperial honor, never to see her again,” said Joseph in a faltering voice. “I will start to-morrow. Thank God, the world is wide; and far away from Vienna I, too, can seek for oblivion, and, perchance, for another ray of earthly happiness.”

And so ended the pastoral of the Emperor and the village-maid.

CHAPTER III.

COUNT FALKENSTEIN.

“AWAY with care and sorrow! Away with royalty and state!” cried the Emperor, as the long train of wagons, which had accompanied him from Vienna, were disappearing in the distance.

The Empress had caused the preparation for her son’s journey to be made with imperial pomp. A brilliant cortège of nobles and gentlemen had followed the Emperor’s *calèche*, and behind them came twelve wagons with beds, cooking utensils, and provisions—the whole gotten up with true princely magnificence.

The Emperor had said nothing, and had left Vienna amid the chiming of bells and the loud greetings of the people. For two days he submitted to the tedious pageants of public receptions, stupid addresses,

girls in white, and flower-decked arches; but, on the morning of the third day, two couriers announced not only to the discomfited gentlemen composing his *suite*, but to the conductors of the provision-train, that the Emperor would excuse them from further attendance.

Everybody was astonished, and everybody disappointed. The Emperor, meanwhile, stood by laughing until the last wagon was out of sight.

"Away with sorrow and care!" cried he, approaching his two carriage companions, Counts Rosenberg and Coronini. "Now, my friends," exclaimed he, putting a hand upon the shoulder of each one, "now the world is ours. Let us enjoy our rich inheritance. But—bless me, how forlorn you both look! What is the matter? Have I been mistaken in supposing that you would relish my plan of travel?"

"No, your Majesty," replied Rosenberg, with a forced smile, "but I am afraid you will scarcely relish it yourself. You have parted with every convenience that makes travelling endurable."

"Your Majesty will have to put up with many a sorry dinner and many an uncomfortable bed," sighed Coronini.

"I am tired of comforts and conveniences," rejoined the Emperor, laughing, "and I long for the variety of privation. But, in my thoughtlessness, I had taken it for granted that you, too, were weary of grandeur, and would like to get a taste of ordinary life. If I am mistaken, you are free to return with my discharged cortège; I force no one to share my hardships. Speak quickly, for there is yet time for me to select other fellow-travelers."

"No, no, your Majesty," said Rosenberg, gaily, "I will go whither you go, and share your privations."

"Here I stay, to live and die at your Majesty's side!" cried Coronini, with comic fervor.

The Emperor nodded. "Thank you both, my friends, I had counted upon you, and would have regretted your refusal to go with me. Thank heaven, we are no longer under the necessity of parading our rank about the world. I cannot express to you the joy I feel at the prospect of going about unnoticed, like any other man."

"That joy will be denied your Majesty," said Rosenberg, with a slight inclination. "The Emperor Joseph can never go unnoticed, like ordinary men."

"Do not hope it, your Majesty!" cried Coronini. "Your Majesty's rank is stamped upon your brow, and you cannot hide it."

The Emperor looked down at the sandy hillock, on which they stood, then upwards at the bright, blue sky above their heads.

"Are we then under the gilded dome of my mother's palace," said he, after a pause, "that I should still hear the language of courtly falsehood? Awake my friends, for this is not Austria's imperial capitol. It is the world, which God created, and here upon our mother earth we stand as man to man. A little shining beetle is creeping on my boot as familiarly as it would upon the *sabot* of a base-born laborer. If my

divine right were written upon my brow, would not the insects acknowledge my sovereignty, as in Eden they acknowledged that of Adam? But no!—The little creature spreads its golden wings and leaves me without a sign. Happy beetle! Would that I too had wings, that I might flee away and be at rest!” The Emperor heaved a sigh, and his thoughts evidently wandered far away from the scene before him. But presently recalling himself, he spoke again. Pointing to the sky he said:

“And now, friends, look above you where the heavens enthrone a Jehovah, in whose sight all men are equal, and so long as we dwell together under the open sky, remember Him who has said ‘Thou shalt have no other Gods before me!’”

—“But, your Majesty——”

—“Majesty! Where is any majesty here? If I were a lion to shake the forests with my roar, I might pretend to majesty among the brutes, but you see that I am, in all things, like yourself—neither nobler nor greater than you. In Vienna I am your Sovereign: so be it; but while we travel, I am simply Count Falkenstein. I beg you to respect this name and title, for the Falkensteins are an older race of nobles than the Hapsburgs, and the turreted castle of my ancestors, the Count’s, is one of the oldest in Germany. Away, then, with royalty! I ask for admittance into your own rank. Will you accept me, and promise that we shall be on terms of equality?”

He offered a hand to each of his friends, and would not permit them to do otherwise than press it, in token of assent.

“Now let me tell you my plans. We travel like three happy fellows, bent upon recreation alone. We go and stay as it best suits us: when we are hungry, we will dine: when we are tired, we will sleep. A little straw will make our beds, and our cloaks shall keep us warm.* In Florence I shall be forced to play the Emperor, as the reigning Duke is my brother; but he, too, will join us, and then we shall all go on traveling *incognito*. First we visit Rome, then Naples. We must find out whether our sister Caroline has taught her Lazzaroni-King to read and write; and when we have learned something of her domestic life, we will turn our faces homewards. In Milan, I must again play the Emperor, for Lombardy needs my protection, and I must give it. From Lombardy I return to Vienna. Does the route please you?”

“Exceedingly, Count,” replied Rosenberg.”

“It does indeed, your Highness,” added Coronini.

“And why my Highness?” asked Joseph, laughing.

“Because the Counts of Falkenstein were Princes, and the title being appropriate, I hope your Majesty will allow me to use it.”

“I regret, very much, most worthy master-of-ceremonies itinerant, that I cannot do so. Pack up your court-manners, Coronini, and carry them in your trunk until we get back to Vienna.”

*The Emperor, during his tour as Count Falkenstein, repeatedly slept on straw, over which a leather cover was spread. Hubner 1, page 43.

"So be it then," sighed Coronini, "since your M——, I mean my lord Count, will have it so, we must be content to have you hidden under a cloud, like Jupiter, when he made acquaintance with Jo."

"By Jupiter, Coronini, you are ambitious in your similes," replied the Emperor, laughing. "You look very much like Jo, do you not?"

"I hope we may be as lucky as the gods," interrupted Rosenberg, "for every time they visited the earth, they were sure to fall in with all the pretty women."

"True; but Mythology teaches that the women who aspired to love gods, forfeited both happiness and life," replied the Emperor, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "But pshaw!" continued he, suddenly, "what do I say? Away with retrospection! Let us come out of the clouds, and approach, both of you, while I entrust you with a great secret—I am hungry."

The two Counts started in breathless haste for the carriage, near which the Emperor's valet and the postillion were in earnest conversation, but they returned with very long faces.

"Count," said Rosenberg, sadly, "we have nothing to eat."

"The valet says that Count Falkenstein ordered everything to be sent back to Vienna except our trunks," sighed Coronini. "All the wine, bread, game and delicacies, remained in the wagons."

"Very well," cried the Emperor, laughing heartily at the *contretemps*, "let us go and ask for dinner in yonder village behind the wood."

"The postillion says that there is not a public house anywhere about," continued Coronini, in great distress. "He says that we will find nothing to eat in the village."

Instead of making a reply, the Emperor walked to the hillock and questioned the postillion himself.

"What is the name of the village beyond the forest?" asked he.

"Wichern, your Majesty."

"Do we change horses there?"

"No, your Majesty, we harness up at Unterbergen."

"Can we get any breakfast at Wichern, think you?"

"No, no, your Majesty, not a morsel of anything—none but peasants live in the village."

"Well, my friend, do the peasants live without eating?"

"Oh, your Majesty, *they* eat anything! They live on bread, bacon, eggs and milk, with sometimes a mess of cabbage or beans."

"And you call that having nothing to eat?" exclaimed Joseph, hastening joyfully back to his friends. "Come, come; we shall find dinner at Wichern, and if nobody will cook for us, we will cook for ourselves."

Coronini opened his eyes like full moons.

"Why do you stare so, Coronini? Are not all soldiers cooks? I, at least, am resolved to learn, and I feel beforehand that I shall do honor to myself. Cook and butler, I shall fill both offices. Come, we are go-

ing to enjoy ourselves. Thomas, tell the postillion to drive as far as the entrance of the village. We will forage on foot."

The Emperor bounded into the carriage, the two noblemen followed, the postillion cracked his whip, and they were soon at Wichern.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THEY FOUND AT WICHERN.

THE carriage stopped, and before the valet had had time to open the door, the Emperor leaped to the ground.

"Come," said he merrily, "come and seek your fortunes. Thomas, you remain with the carriage. Drive under the shade of that tree and wait for our return. Before all things I forbid you to tell anybody who we are. From this day forward, my name is Count Falkenstein. Mark me! I expect you to preserve my *incognito*."

"I will obey you, my lord Count," said the valet with a bow.

The Emperor with his two companions walked towards the village. Nothing very hopeful was to be seen as they looked up the dirty little streets. The wretched mud cottages stood each one apart, their yards separated by scraggy willow hedges, upon which ragged old garments were hanging in the sun to dry. Between the hedges were muddy pools over which the ducks were wrangling for the bits of weed that floated on the surface of the foul waters. On their borders, in the very midst of the rubbish and kitchen-offal that lay about in heaps, dirty half-naked children, with straw-colored hair, tumbled over one another, or paddled in the water. In the farm-yards around the dung-heaps, the youngest children of the cottagers kept company with the sow and her grunting pigs. Before the slovenly entrances of the huts, here and there, sat dirty unseemly old men and women, who stared at the three strangers as they surveyed the uninviting picture before them.

"I congratulate the Emperor that he is not obliged to look upon this shocking scene," said Joseph. "I am glad that his people cannot cry out to him for help, since help for such squalor as this, there is none on earth."

"They are not as wretched as you suppose," said Rosenberg. "These people are scarcely above the brute creation; and they know of nothing better than the existence which is so shocking to you. They were born and bred in squalor, and provided their pastures yield forage, their hens lay eggs, and their cows give milk, they live and die contented."

"If so, they are an enviable set of mortals," replied Joseph laughing, "and we, who require so much for our comfort, are poorer than they. But as there is no help for our poverty, let us think of dinner. Here are three streets; the village seems to have been divided for our especial accommodation. Each one shall take a street, and in one hour from now we meet at the carriage, each man with a dish of contribution. *En avant!* I take the street before me; you do the same. Look at your watches, and be punctual."

So saying, he waved his hand, and hastened forwards. The same solitude and misery met his view as he walked on; the same ducks, hens, sows and tumbling children, with now and then the sound of a scolding woman's shrill treble, or the melancholy lowing of a sick cow.

"I am curious now," thought the Emperor, "to know how and where I am to find my dinner. But stay—here is a cottage less slovenly than its neighbors, I will tempt my fortunes there."

He opened the wicker gate and entered the yard. The lazy sow that lay on the dunghill, grunted, but took no further notice of the imperial intruder. He stopped before the low cottage door and knocked, but no one came. The place seemed silent and deserted—not the faintest hum of life was to be heard from within.

"I shall take the liberty of going in without awaiting an invitation," said the Emperor, pushing open the door and entering the cottage. But he started at the unexpected sight that met his view as he looked around the room. It was a miserable place, cold and bare; not a chair or any other article of household furniture was to be seen; but in the centre of the room stood a small deal coffin, and in the coffin was the corpse of a child. Still and cold, beautiful and tranquil, lay the babe, a smile still lingering around its mouth, while its half open eyes seemed fixed upon the white roses that were clasped in its little dimpled hands. The coffin lay in the midst of flowers, and within, slept the dead child, transfigured and glorified.

The Emperor advanced softly and bent over it. He looked, with tender sympathy, at the little marble image, that yesterday was a poor, ragged peasant: to-day, was a bright and winged angel. His thoughts flew back to the imperial palace, where his little motherless daughter was fading away from earth, and the father prayed for his only child. He took from the passive hands a rose, and, softly as he came, he left the solitary cottage, where an angel was keeping watch.

He passed over to the neighboring yard. Here, too, everything seemed to be at rest; but a savory odor saluted the nostrils of the noble adventurer that at last betokened the presence of beings who hungered and thirsted, and had some regard for the creature comforts of life.

"Ah! said the Emperor," drawing in the fragrant smell, "That savors of meat and greens," and he hurried through the house to the kitchen. Sure enough, there blazed a roaring fire, and from the chimney-crane there hung the steaming pot, whence issued the delightful

aroma of budding dinner. On the hearth stood a young woman of cleanly appearance, who was stirring the contents of the pot with a great wooden spoon.

"Good morning, madam," said the Emperor, in a loud, cheerful voice. The woman started, gave a scream, and turned her glowing face to the door.

"What do you mean by coming into strange people's houses and frightening them so?" cried she, angrily. "Nobody asked you in, I am sure."

"Pardou me, madam," said the Emperor. "I was urgently invited."

"I should like to know who invited you, for nobody is here but myself, and I don't want you."

"Yes, madam; but your steaming kettle, I do assure you, has given me a pressing invitation to dine here."

"Oh! you are witty, are you? Well, carry your wits elsewhere. They won't serve you here."

"My kettle calls nobody but those who are to eat of my dinner."

"That is the very thing I want, madam. I want to eat of your dinner." As he spoke, the Emperor kept advancing, until he came close upon the kettle and its tempting contents; but the peasant woman pushed him rudely back, and, thrusting her broad person between himself and the coveted pot, she looked defiance at him, and broke out into a torrent of abuse.

The Emperor laughed aloud. "I don't wish to rob you," said he. "I will pay you handsomely if you will only let me have your dinner. What have you in that pot?"

"That is none of your business. With my bacon and beans you have no concern."

"Bacon and beans! Oh! my craving stomach! Here, take this piece of gold, and give me some directly."

"Do you take me for a fool, to sell my dinner just as the men will be coming from the field?"

"By no means for a fool," said the Emperor, soothingly, "but if you show the men that golden ducat, they will wait patiently until you cook them another dinner. Your husband can buy himself a fine holiday suit with this."

"He has one, and don't want two. Go your way, you shall not have a morsel of my dinner."

"Not if I give you *two* gold pieces? Come, do be accommodating, and give me the bacon and beans."

"I tell you, you shall not have them," screamed the termagant. "I have no use for your gold, but I want my dinner. So be off with you; you will get nothing from me, if you beg all day long."

"Very well, madam, I bid you good morning," said Joseph, laughing, but inwardly chagrined at his *fiasco*. "I must go on, however," thought he; and he entered the yard of the next house. Before the door sat a pale young woman, with a new-born infant in her arms. She looked up with a languid smile.

"I am hungry," said Joseph, after greeting her with uncovered head. "Have you anything good in your kitchen?"

She shook her head sadly. "I am a poor weak creature, sir, and cannot get a meal for my husband," replied she; he will have to cook his own dinner when he comes home."

— "And what will he cook to-day for instance?"

"I suppose he will make an omelet; for the hens have been cackling a great deal this morning, and an omelet is made in a few minutes."

"Is it? So much the better then, you can show me how to make one, and I will pay you well."

"Go in the hen-coops, sir, and see if you find any eggs. My husband will want three of them; the rest are at your service."

"Where is the hen-coops?" asked Joseph much pleased.

"Go through the kitchen out into the yard, and you will see a little room with a wooden bolt; that is the hen-coop."

"I go," cried Joseph merrily. Presently great commotion was heard among the hens, and the Emperor returned with a glowing face, his hair and coat well sprinkled with straw. He came forward with both hands full of eggs.

"Here are eight," said he. Three for your husband, and five for me. Now tell me how I must cook them."

"You will have to go to the kitchen, sir. There you will find a fitch of bacon. Cut off some slices, put them in a pan you will see there, and set it on the fire. My neighbor has just now made some for poor John. Then look on the dresser and take some milk and a little flour. Make a batter of them with the eggs, pour it upon your bacon, and when the eggs are done, the omelet is made. It is the easiest thing in the world."

"My dear good woman, it will be a desperately hard task for me," said the Emperor with a sigh. "I'm afraid I shall make a very poor omelet. Won't you come into the kitchen and make it for me? Do, I will pay you well."

"Dear gentleman," said the young woman, blushing, "do you think I am so idle as to sit here, if I could get up and help you? I was brought to bed yesterday of this baby; and I am such a poor, sickly thing that I shall not be able to get up before two days. As the day was bright, dear John brought me and the baby out here, because it was more cheerful on the door-sill than within. I am a weak, useless, creature, sir."

"Weak! useless!" cried the Emperor, astounded; "and you expect to be up in three days after your confinement. Poor little thing! Have you no physician and no medicine?"

"The Lord is my physician, sir," said the simple creature, "and my medicine is the fresh air. But let me think of your omelet, sir. If you cannot make it yourself, just step to the cottage on the left and call my neighbor. She is very good to me, and she will make your omelet for you with pleasure."

"A thousand thanks," said the Emperor, hastening to follow the di-

reactions. He returned in a few moments with a good-humored, healthy young woman, who went to work cheerfully and the omelet was soon made.

One hour after he had parted from his friends, the Emperor was seen coming along the street with a platter in his hand and a little bucket on his arm. He walked carefully, his eyes fixed upon his precious dish, all anxiety lest it should fall from his hands.

Thomas was thunderstruck. An Emperor carrying an earthen platter in his hand! He darted forward to receive it, but Joseph motioned him away.

"Don't touch me, Thomas," said he, "or I shall let it fall. I intend to place it with my own hands. Go, now, and set the table. Pile up some of those flat stones, and bring the carriage cushions. We will dine under that wide-spreading oak. Make haste, I am very hungry."

Off went Thomas, obedient, though bewildered; and he had soon improvised a table, over which he laid a shining damask cloth. Luckily, the Emperor's camp-chest had not been put in the baggage-wagon, or his Majesty would have had to eat with his fingers. But the golden service was soon forthcoming, with goblets of sparkling crystal, and three bottles of fine old Hungarian wine.

"Now," said Joseph, triumphantly. "Let me place my dishes." With these words he put on his platter and basket with great ceremony and undisguised satisfaction.

A curious medley of wealth and poverty were these golden plates and forks with the coarse red platter, that contained the hard-earned omelet. But the omelet was smoking and savory, and the strawberries were splendid.

While the Emperor was enjoying the result of his foraging expedition, Rosenberg and Coronini were seen approaching, each with his earthen platter in his hand.

"The hour is up and we are here," said Coronini. "I have the honor of laying my dish at your M—— feet, Count."

"Potatoes! beautiful, roasted potatoes," cried Joseph. "Why Count, you have brought us a treat."

"I rejoice to hear it, my lord Count, for I was threatened with a broom stick when I tore it from the hands of the woman who vowed I should not have a single potatoe. I dashed two ducats at her feet, and made off with all speed; for the hour was almost up, and I had exhausted all my manners in the ten houses, which I had visited in vain, before my successful raid upon her's."

"And will not my lord Count cast an eye upon my dish?" asked Rosenberg.

"He has obtained that for which I sued in vain!" cried Joseph. "He has actually brought bacon and beans."

"But I did not sue; I stormed and threatened. Neither did I waste my gold to obtain my end. I threw the woman a silver dollar and plenty of abuse in the bargain."

"Let us be seated!" said the Emperor. "and pray admire my omelet and strawberries. Now, Coronini, the strawberries are tempting, but before you taste them I must tell you that they are tainted with treason: treason towards my own sacred person. Reflect well before you decide to eat of them. What I am going to relate is as terrible as it is true. While my omelet was cooking, I strolled out into the road to see if there was anything else in Wichern besides poultry, pigs and dirty children. Coming towards me I perceived a pretty little bare-foot boy, with a basket full of red, luscious strawberries. I asked where he was going. He said, to the neighboring village to sell his strawberries to the farmer's wife, who had ordered them. I offered to buy them but my gold could not tempt the child—he refused peremptorily to sell them to me at any price. I argued, I pleaded, I threatened all to no purpose. At length, seeing there was no other alternative, I snatched his strawberries away, threw him a ducat, and walked off with the prize. He picked up the gold, but as he did so, he saluted my imperial ears with an epithet—such an epithet! Oh, you will shudder when you hear what language the little rascal used to his sovereign! You never will be able to bear it, Coronini, you, whose loyalty is offended every time you address me as Count Falkenstein. I only wonder that the sun did not hide its head, and the earth tremble at the sacrilege! What do you suppose he called me? An ass! He did, I assure you. That little bare-legged boy called his Emperor an ass! Now, Coronini, do you think you can taste of the strawberries that were gathered by those treacherous little hands?"

"If my lord Count allows it, I will venture to eat," replied Coronini, "for I really think there was no treason committed."

"What! not when he called me an ——"

"Pray do not say it again," entreated Coronini, raising his hands deprecatingly; "it cuts me to the heart. But Count Falkenstein had already proclaimed that no majesty was by, and when no majesty was there, no majesty could be insulted."

"Oh, you sophist! Did you not say that I wore my title upon my brow? Did you not tell me that I could not hide my majesty from the sons of men? But I forgive you and the boy also. Let us drink his health while we enjoy his strawberries. Fill your glasses to the brim, and having done honor to those who furnished our repast, allow me to propose—ourselves: 'To the health of those who are about to eat a dinner which they have earned by the sweat of their brow.'"

So saying; the Emperor touched the glasses of his friends.

"Now, postillion," cried he, before they drank, "blow us a blast on your horn—a right merry blast!"

The postillion put the horn to his lips, and while he blew the glasses clinked gaily; and the friends laughed, jested and ate their dinner with a relish they had seldom known before.*

* Hubner: Life of Joseph II. Vol. 1, page 49.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOMNAMBULIST.

THE policy, instituted by Kaunitz, when he became sole minister of the Empress, had now culminated in the alliance of Austria with France, through the solemn betrothal of the childish Maria Antoinette with the Dauphin. The union was complete—it was to be cemented by the strong tie of inter-marriage, and now, that success had crowned the schemes to which she had yielded such hearty consent, Maria Theresa was anxious, restless and unhappy. Vainly she strove to thrust from her memory the prophecy which had been foretold in relation to the destinies of France. With anguish she remembered the cry of Marie Antoinette; with horror she recurred to the vision which had overcome Catharine de Medecis.

“It is sinful in me,” thought the Empress, as one morning she left her pillow from inability to sleep. “God, alone, is Lord of futurity, and no human hand dare lift its black curtain!” But stay! cried she, suddenly springing up, and in her eager haste, beginning to dress without assistance. “There is in Vienna a holy nun, who is said to be a prophetess, and Father Gassner, to whom I have extended protection, he too, is said at times to enjoy the privilege of God’s prophets of old. Perhaps they have been sent in mercy to warn us, lest in our ignorance of consequences, we stumble and sin.”

For some time the Empress walked up and down her room, undecided whether to turn the Sybilline leaves or not. It might be sinful to question, it might be fatal to remain ignorant. Was it, or was it not the will of God, that she should pry into the great mysteries of futurity? Surely it could not be sinful, else why should He have given to His servants the gift of prophecy.

“I will go to the Ursuline nun,” concluded she, “and Father Gassner shall come to me.”

She rang and ordered a carriage with no attendant but her first lady of honor. No footmen, no out-riders, but a simple court equipage; “and inform Father Gassner that in one hour I shall await him in the palace.”

In less than half an hour the carriage of the Empress was at the gate of the Ursuline Convent. Completely disguised in a long black cloak, with her face hidden under a thick veil, Maria Theresa leaped eagerly to the ground.

Her attendant was about to follow, but the Empress motioned her to remain. “Await me here,” said she, “I do not wish to be known in

the convent. I am about to imitate my son, and visit my subjects *incognito*."

The portress, who had recognized the imperial liveries, made no opposition to the entrance of the tall, veiled figure. She supposed her to be some lady of the Empress's household, and allowed her to pass at once into the hall, following her steps with undisguised curiosity.

She had already ascended the stair-case, when she turned to the portress.

"In which cell is the invalid nun?" asked she.

"Your Highness means sister Margaret, the somnambulist?" asked the portress. "She has been taken to the parlor of the Abbess, for the convenience of the many who visit her now."

"Does she pretend to reveal the future?"

"It would make your Highness's hair stand on end to hear her! She has been asleep this morning, and do you know what she said in her sleep? She prophesied that the convent would be honored by a visit from the Empress on this very day."

"Did she, indeed?" faltered Maria Theresa. "When? How long ago?"

"About two hours ago, your Highness. And as she is never mistaken, the Abbess has prepared all things for her Majesty's reception. Doubtless your ladyship has been sent to announce her?"

"You really feel sure that she will come?"

"Certainly. Sister Margaret's visions are prophetic—we cannot doubt them."

The Empress shuddered and drew her cloak close around her. "Gracious heaven," thought she. "What if she should prophecy evil for my child?" "It is well," added she, aloud, "where shall I find her?"

"Your Highness has only to turn to the left; the last door leads into the parlor of the Abbess."

A deep silence reigned throughout the convent. The Empress went on through the dim, long corridor, now with hurried step and wildly beating heart, now suddenly pausing, faint and irresolute, to lean against a pillar, and gather courage for the interview. As she turned the corner of the corridor, a flood of light, streaming through an oriel window, revived and cheered her. She stepped forward and looked. The window opened upon the chapel, where the lights were burning upon the altar and high mass was about to begin, for sister Margaret had said that the Empress was very near.

"'Tis true. They are waiting for me. Oh, she must be a prophetess, for, two hours ago, I had not dreamed of coming hither! I feel my courage fail me. I will go back. I dare not hear, for it is too late."

The Empress turned and retraced her steps; then once more calling up all her fortitude, she returned. "For," thought she, "if God permits me to see, why should I remain blind? He it is, who has sent me to this holy prophetess. I *must* listen for my Antoinette's sake."

A second time she went forward, reached the parlor, and opened the

door. She had scarcely appeared on the threshold, cloaked and screened by her thick black veil, when a clear voice, whose tones were preter-human in their melody, addressed her. "Hail, Empress of Austria! All hail to her, who cometh hither!"

"She is indeed a prophetess!" murmured the Empress. "She knows me through my disguise."

She approached the bed and bent over it. The nun lay with closed eyes; but a heavenly smile was upon her lips, and a holy light seemed to play around her pale but beautiful face. Not the least tinge of color was on her cheeks; and but for the tint of carmine upon her lips, she might have been mistaken for a sculptor's dream of Azrael, the pale angel of death, so unearthly, so seraphic was her beauty.

While the Empress gazed awe-stricken, the Abbess and the nuns who had been kneeling around the bed arose to greet their Sovereign.

"Is it indeed our gracious Empress?" asked the Abbess. Maria Theresa withdrew her hood and veil and revealed her pale, agitated face. "I am the Empress," said she, "but I implore you let there be no more ceremony because of my visit. In this sacred habitation, God alone is great, and his creatures are all equal before him. We are in the presence of the servant to whom He has condescended to speak, while to the sovereigns of earth he is silent. To Him alone belongs homage."

—"Gracious Empress, sister Margaret had announced your Majesty's visit, and we were to have greeted you as becomes Christian subjects. The chapel is prepared, the altar is decked."

"I will repair later to the church, mother. At present, my visit is to sister Margaret."

"If so, your Majesty must not delay. She sleeps but three hours at a time, and she will soon awake. She has the gift of prophecy in her sleep alone."

"Then go, holy mother, and leave me alone with her. Go and await me in the church."

The Abbess glanced at the clock on the wall. "She will awake in ten minutes," said she, and with noiseless steps the nuns all left the room.

The Empress waited until the door was closed and the sound of their light foot-fall had died away, then again approaching the bed, she called, "sister Margaret."

The nun trembled and her brow grew troubled. "Oh!" said she, "the angels have flown! Why have you come with your sad notes of sorrow to silence the harmony of my heavenly dreams?"

"You know then that I am sad?" asked the Empress.

"Yes—your heart is open to me. I see your anguish. The mother comes to me, not the Empress."

Maria Theresa feeling herself in the presence of a supernatural being, glided down upon her knees. "You are right," said she, "it is indeed a sorrowing mother who kneels before you, imploring you in the humility of her heart to say what God hath revealed of her daughter's fate!"

"Oh!" cried the nun, in a voice of anguish,

But the Empress went on. "My soul trembles for Marie Antoinette. Something seems to warn me not to trust my child to the foul atmosphere of that court of France, where Dubarry sits by the side of the King, and the nobles pay her homage as though she were a virtuous queen. Oh, tell me, holy sister, what will become of my Antoinette in France?"

"Oh! oh!" wailed the nun, and she writhed upon her bed.

"She is so sweet, so pure, so innocent," continued the Empress. "My spotless dove! Will she soil her wings? Oh, sister, speak to me!"

"Oh!" cried the nun for the third time, and the Empress trembled, while her face grew white as that of the prophetess.

"I am on my knees," murmured she, "and I await your answer. Sister Margaret! sister Margaret! In the name of God, who has endowed you with superhuman wisdom, tell me what is to be the fate of Marie Antoinette?"

"Thou hast called on the name of God," said the nun in a strange, clear voice, "and I am forced to answer thee. Thou wilt know the fate of Marie Antoinette? Hear it: '*She will live through much evil, but she will return to virtue.*'"*

"She will then cease to be virtuous," cried the Empress, bursting into tears.

"She will learn much evil," repeated the nun, turning uneasily on her bed. She will endure—Poor Marie Antoinette! Unhappy Queen of France! Woe! Woe!"

"Woe unto me!" cried the wretched mother. "Woe unto her who leadeth her children into temptation!"

"She will return to virtue!" murmured the nun indistinctly. "Poor Queen—of—France!"

With a loud cry she threw out her arms and sat upright in the bed. Her eyes opened, and she looked around the room.

"Where is the reverend mother?" cried she. "Where are the sisters?"

Suddenly her eyes rested upon the black and veiled figure of the Empress.

"Who are you!" exclaimed she. "Away with you, black shadow! I am not yet dead! Not yet! Oh, this pain, this pain!" And the nun fell back upon her pillow.

Maria Theresa rose from her knees, and, wild with terror, fled from the room. Away she sped through the long, dark corridor to the window that overlooked the chapel, where the nuns were awaiting her return—away down the wide stone staircase, through the hall, out into the open air. She hurried into the carriage and, once seated, fell back upon the cushions and wept aloud.

* Swinburne; vol. 1, page 351.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROPHECY.

THE Empress spoke not a word during the drive to the palace. She was so absorbed in her sorrow as to be unconscious of the presence of another person, and she wept without restraint until the carriage stopped. Then, stifling her sobs and hastily drying her tears, she dropped her veil and walked with her usual majestic gait through the palace halls. In her ante-room she met a gentleman in waiting coming towards her.

"Father Gassner, your Majesty."

"Where is he?"

"Here, so please your Majesty."

"Let him follow me in my cabinet," said the Empress, going forward, while the courtier and the priest came behind. When she reached the door of her cabinet she turned. "Wait here," said she. "When I ring, I beg of you to enter, Father. The Count will await your return in this room."

She entered her cabinet and closed the door. Once more alone, she gave vent to her sorrow. She wept aloud and in her ears she seemed to hear the clear metallic voice of the sick nun pealing out those dreadful words: "*She will live through much evil, but will return to virtue!*"

But Maria Theresa was no coward. She was determined to master her credulity.

"I am a simpleton," thought she. "I must forget the dreams of a delirious nun. How could I be so weak as to imagine that God would permit a hysterical invalid to prophecy to a sound and strong woman like myself? I will speak with Father Gassner. Perhaps he may see the future differently. If he does, I shall know that they are both false prophets, and their prophecies, I shall throw to the winds."

Strengthened by these reflections, the Empress touched her bell. The door opened, and Father Gassner entered the room. He bowed, and then drawing his tall, majestic figure to its full height, he remained standing by the door, with his large, dark-blue eyes fixed upon the face of the Empress. She returned the glance. There seemed to be a strife between the eyes of the sovereign, who was accustomed to see others bend before her, and those of the inspired man, whose intercourse was with the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Each met the other with dignity and composure.

Suddenly the Empress strode haughtily up to the priest and said, in a tone that sounded almost defiant.

"Father Gassner, have you the courage to look me in the face and assert yourself to be a prophet?"

"It requires no courage to avow a gift, which God, in the superabundance of His goodness, has bestowed upon one who does not deserve it," replied the Father, gently. "If my eyes are opened to see, or my hand to heal, glory be to God, Who has blessed them. The light, the grace, are not mine, why should I deny my Lord.*"

"Then if I question you, as to the future, you will answer?"

"If it is given to me to do so, I will answer."

"Tell me, then, whether Antoinette will be happy in her marriage?"

The priest turned pale, but he said nothing.

"Speak, speak, or I will denounce you as a false prophet."

"Is this the only thing your Majesty has to ask of me?"

"The only one."

"Then denounce me, for I cannot answer your Majesty."

Gassner turned, and his hand was upon the lock of the door.

"Stay!" cried the Empress, haughtily. "I command you, as your sovereign, to speak the truth."

"The truth!" cried Gassner, in a voice of anguish, and his large eyes opened with an expression of horror. What did he see with those eyes that seemed to look far out into the dim aisles of the terrible future?

"The truth!" echoed the unhappy mother. "Tell me, will my Antoinette be happy?"

Deep sighs convulsed the breast of the priest, and with a look of inexpressible agony, he answered, solemnly, "Empress of Austria, WE HAVE ALL OUR CROSS TO BEAR."†

The Empress started back with a cry.

"Again! again!" murmured she, burying her face in her hands. But suddenly coming forward, her eyes flaming like those of an angry lioness, she said, "what mean these riddles? Speak out at once, and tell me without equivocation, what is to be the fate of Antoinette!"

"WE HAVE ALL OUR CROSS TO BEAR," repeated the priest, "and the Queen of France will surely have hers." With these words, the priest turned and left the room.

Pale and rigid, the Empress stood in the middle of the room, murmuring to herself the two fearful prophecies. "She will live through much evil, but will return to virtue." "We have all our cross to bear, and the Queen of France will surely bear hers."

For awhile Maria Theresa was overwhelmed by the double blow she had received. But it was not in her nature to succumb to circumstances. She must overrule them.

She rang her bell, and a page entered the room. "Let a messenger be dispatched to Prince Kaunitz, I wish to see his Highness. He can come to me unannounced."

* Father Gassner was one of the most remarkable thaumaturgists of the eighteenth century. He healed all sorts of diseases by the touch of his hand, and multitudes flocked to him for cure. His extraordinary powers displeased the Bishop of his Diocese, and, to avoid censure, Father Gassner sought protection from the Empress, who held him in great reverence. His prediction concerning the fate of Marie Antoinette, was generally known long before its accomplishment. It was related to Madam Campan, by a son of Kaunitz, years before the Revolution.

† *Memoires de Madame Campan* : Vol. 2, page 14.

Not long after, the Prince made his appearance. A short, sharp glance at the agitated mien of the Empress, showed to the experienced diplomatist that to-day, as so often before, he must oppose the shield of indifference to the storm of passion with which he was about to contend.

"Your Majesty," said he, "has sent for me just as I was about to request an audience. I am in receipt of letters from the Emperor. He has spent a day with the King of Prussia."

He attempted to give the letters into the hands of the Empress, but she put them back with a gesture of impatience. "Prince Kaunitz," said she, "it is you who have done this—you must undo it. It cannot, shall not be."

"What does your Majesty mean?" asked Kaunitz, astonished.

"I speak of that which lies nearest my heart," said the Empress, warmly.

"Of the meeting of the Emperor with the King of Prussia," returned Kaunitz, quietly. "Yesterday they met at Neisse. It was a glorious interview. The two monarchs embraced, and the Emperor remarked——"

"Enough, enough," cried Maria Theresa, impatiently. "You affect to misunderstand me. I speak of Antoinette's engagement to the Dauphin. It must be broken. My daughter shall not go to France."

Kaunitz was so completely astounded, so *sincerely* astounded, that he was speechless. The paint upon his face could not conceal the angry flush that colored it, nor his pet locks cover the wrinkles that rose up to disfigure his forehead.

"Do not stare at me as if you thought I was parting with my senses," cried the Empress. "I know very well what I say. I will not turn my innocent Antoinette into that den of corruption. She shall not bear a cross from which it is in my power to save her."

"Who speaks of crosses?" asked Kaunitz, bewildered. "The only thing of which I have heard, is a royal crown wherewith her brow is to be decked."

"She shall not wear that crown!" exclaimed Maria Theresa. "God, himself, has warned me through the lips of His prophets, and not unheeded shall the warning fall."

Kaunitz breathed more freely, and his features resumed their wonted calmness. "If that is all," thought he, gaily, "I shall be victorious. An ebullition of superstition is easily quieted by a little good news. "Your Majesty has been following the new fashion," said he aloud, "you have been consulting the fortune-tellers. I presume you have visited the nun who is subject to pious hysterics, and Father Gassner, I see, has been visiting your Majesty; for I met him as I was coming to the palace. I could not help laughing as I saw his absurd length of visage."

Maria Theresa, in reply to this irony, related the answers which had been made to her questions. Kaunitz listened with sublime indifference, and evinced not a spark of sympathy. When the Empress had concluded her story, he merely said, "what else, your Majesty?"

"What else," echoed the Empress, surprised.

"Yes, your Majesty. Surely there must be something more than a pair of vague sentences, a pair of 'ohs' and 'ahs,' and a sick nun and a silly priest. These insignificant nothings are certainly not enough to overturn the structure, which for ten years, we have employed all our skill to build up."

"I well know that you are an infidel and an unbeliever, Kaunitz," cried the Empress, vexed at the quiet sneers of her minister. "I know you believe that only which you can understand and explain."

"No, your Majesty, I believe all that is reasonable. What I cannot comprehend is unreasonable."

The Empress glanced angrily at his stony countenance. "God, sometimes, speaks to us through the mouths of his chosen ones," cried she, "and, as I believe in the inspiration of sister Margaret and Father Gassner, my daughter shall not go to France."

— "Is that your Majesty's unalterable resolution?"

— "It is."

"Then," returned Kaunitz, bowing, "allow me to make a request for myself."

— "Speak on."

"Allow me at once to retire from your Majesty's service."

"Kaunitz!" exclaimed Maria Theresa, "is it possible that you would forsake me?"

"No, your Majesty; it is you who forsakes me. You are willing, for the sake of two crazy seers, to destroy the fabric, which it has been the work of my life to construct. Your Majesty desires that I should remain your minister, and with my own hand should undo the web that I have woven with such trouble to myself? All Europe knows that the French alliance is my work. To this end I have labored by day and lain awake by night—to this end I have flattered and bribed—to this end I have seen my friend, De Choiseul, disgraced, while I bowed low before his miserable successor, that I might win him and that wretched Dubarry to my purpose!"

"You are irretrievably bent upon this alliance?" asked the Empress thoughtfully. "It was then not to gratify me that you sought to place a crown upon my dear child's head?"

— "Your Majesty's wishes have always been sacred to me, but I should never have sought to gratify them had they not been in accordance with my sense of duty to Austria. I have not sought to make a Queen of the Archduchess Maria Antoinette. I have sought to unite Austria with France, and to strengthen the south-western powers of Europe against the infidelity and barbarism of Prussia and Russia. In spite of all that is taking place at Neisse, Austria and Prussia are, and ever will be, enemies. The King and the Emperor may flatter and smile but neither believes what the other says. Frederic will never lose an opportunity of robbing. He ogles Russia, and would gladly see her our 'neighbor' if by so doing, he were to gain an insignificant province for Prussia. It is to ward off these dangerous accomplices that we seek

alliance with France, and through France, with Spain, Portugal and Italy. And now, when the goal is won and the prize is ours, your Majesty retracts her imperial word! You are the sovereign, and your will must be done. But I cannot lend my hand to that which my reason condemns as unwise, and my conscience as dishonorable. I beg of your Majesty to-day and forever, to dismiss me from your service!"

The Empress did not make any reply. She had risen and was walking hastily up and down, murmuring low, inarticulate words, and heaving deep, convulsive sighs. Kaunitz followed her with the eye of a cool physician, who watches the crisis of a brain-fever. He looked down, however, as the Empress, stopping, raised her dark, glowing eyes to his. When he met her glance his expression had changed, it had become as usual.

"You have heard the pleadings of the mother," said she, breathing hard, "and you have silenced them with your cold arguments. The Empress has heard, and she it is, who must decide against herself. She has no right to sacrifice her empire to her maternity. May God forgive me," continued she, solemnly clasping her hands, "if I err in quelling the voice of my love which cries so loudly against this union. Let it be accomplished, Maria Antoinette shall be the bride of Louis XVI."

"Spoken like the noble Empress of Austria," cried Kaunitz triumphantly.

"Do not-praise me," returned Maria Theresa, sadly; "but hear what I have to say. You have spoken words so bold that it would seem you fancy yourself to be Emperor of Austria. It was not you who sought alliance with France, but myself. You did nothing but follow out my intentions and obey my commands. The sin of my refusal, therefore, was nothing to you or your conscience—it rested on *my* head alone."

"May God preserve your Majesty to your country and your subjects. May you long be Austria's head, and I—your right hand," exclaimed Kaunitz.

"You do not then wish to retire?" asked she with a languid smile.

"I beg of your Majesty to forgive and retain me."

"So be it, then," returned the Empress, with a light inclination of the head. "But I cannot hear any more to-day. You have no sympathy with my trials as a mother, I have sacrificed my child to Austria, but my heart is pierced with sorrow and apprehension. Leave me to my tears. I cannot feel for any one except my child—my poor, innocent child."

She turned hastily away that he might not see the tears which were already streaming down her face. Kaunitz bowed, and left the cabinet with his usual cold, proud step.

The minister once gone, Maria Theresa gave herself up to the wildest grief. No one saw her anguish but God—no one ever knew how the powerful Empress writhed and wrung her hands in her powerless agony. No one but God and the Emperor, whose mild eyes beamed compassion,

from the gilt frame in which his picture hung, upon the wall. To this picture, Maria Theresa at last raised her eyes, and it seemed, to her excited imagination, that her husband smiled and whispered words of consolation.

"Yes, dear Franz, I hear you," said she. "You would remind me that this is our wedding-day. Alas, I know it! Once, a day of joy and from this moment the anniversary of a great sorrow! Franz, it is *our* child that is the victim! The sweet Antoinette, whose eyes are so like her father's! Oh, dear husband, my heart is heavy with grief! Why may I not go to rest too? But thou wilt not love me if my courage fail. I will be brave Franz; I will work, and try to do my duty."

She approached her writing table, and began to overlook the heaps of papers that awaited her inspection and signature. Gradually her brow cleared and her face resumed its usual expression of deep thought and high resolve. The mother forgot her grief, and the Empress was absorbed in the cares of State.

She felt so strongly the comfort and sustenance derived from labor, that on that day she dined alone, and returned immediately to her writing-desk. Twilight came on, and still the Empress was at work. Finally the rolling of carriages towards the imperial theatre was heard, and presently, the shouts of the applauding audience. The Empress heard nothing. She had never attended the theatre since her husband's death, and it was nothing to her that to-night Lessing's beautiful drama, "Emilia Galotti," was being represented for the first time in Vienna.

Twilight deepened into night and the Empress rang for lights. Then retiring to her dressing-room, she threw off her heavy court costume, and exchanged it for a simple *peignoir*, in which she returned to her cabinet and still wrote on,

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a knock, and a page entered with a golden salver, on which lay a letter.

"A courier from Florence, your Majesty," said he.

Maria Theresa took the letter and dismissed the page. "From my Leopold," said she, while she opened it. "It is an extra-courier. It must announce the *accouchement* of his wife. Oh, my heart, how it beats!"

With trembling hands she held the missive and read it. But at once her face was lighted up with joy, and throwing herself upon her knees before the portrait of the Emperor, she said, "Franz, Leopold has given us a grand-son. Do you hear?"

No answer came in response to the joyful cry of the Empress, and she could not bear the burthen of her joy alone. Some one must rejoice with her. She craved sympathy, and she must go out to seek it.

She left her cabinet. Unmindful of her dress, she sped through the long corridors, farther and still farther, down the staircase and away to the extremest end of the palace, until she reached the imperial theatre.

That night it was crowded. The interest of the spectators had deepened as the play went on. They were absorbed in the scene between

Emilia and her father, when a door was heard to open and to shut.

Suddenly in the imperial box, which had so long been empty, a tall and noble figure bent forward, far over the railing, and a clear, musical voice cried out :

“ Leopold has a son !”

The audience, as if electrified, rose with one accord, from their seats. All turned towards the imperial box. Each one had recognized the voice of the adored Maria Theresa, and every heart overflowed with the joy of the moment.

The Empress repeated her words :

“ Leopold has a son, and it is born on my wedding-day. Wish me joy, dear friends, of my grand-son !”

Then arose such a storm of congratulations as never before had been heard within those theatre walls. The women wept, and the men waived their hats and cheered, while all, with one voice, cried out, “ Long live Maria Theresa ! Long live the imperial grand-mother !”

CHAPTER VII.

THE GIFT.

ALL prophecies defying, Maria Theresa had given her daughter to France. In the month of May 1770, the Archduchess, Maria Antoinette, was married by proxy in Vienna ; and amid the ringing of bells, the booming of cannon, and the shouts of the populace, the beautiful young Dauphiness left Austria to meet her inevitable fate.

Meanwhile, in the imperial palace too, one room was darkening under the shadow of approaching death. It was that in which Isabella's daughter was passing from earth to heaven.

The Emperor knew that his child was dying ; and many an hour he spent at her solitary bedside, where tranquil and smiling, she murmured words which her father knew were whispered to the angels.

The Emperor sorrowed deeply for the severance of the last tie that bound him to the bright and beautiful dream of his early married life. But he was so accustomed to sorrow, that on the occasion of his sister's marriage, he had gone through the forms required by etiquette, without any visible emotion.

But the festivities were at an end. The future Queen of France had bidden farewell to her native Vienna, and the marriage-guests had departed ; while darker and darker grew the chamber of the dying child, and sadder the fate of the widowed father. The Emperor kissed his

daughter's burning forehead, and held her little transparent hand in his. "Farewell, my angel," whispered he, "since thy mother calls thee, go, my little Theresa. Tell her that she was my only love—my first and last. Go, beloved, and pray for thy unhappy father."

Once more he kissed her, and when he raised his head, her face was moistened with his tears. He turned hastily away and left the room.

"And now," thought he, "to my duty. I must forget my own sorrows that I may wipe away the tears of my sorrowing people. There is so much grief and want in Austria! Oh, my child; my little one! Amid the blessings of the suffering poor, shalt thou stretch forth thy wings and take thy flight to heaven!"

He was on his way to seek an audience of his mother. Maria Theresa was in her cabinet, and was somewhat surprised to see her son at this unusual hour of the day.

"I come to your Majesty to beg a boon," said Joseph, with a sad smile. "Yesterday you were distributing Antoinette's wedding-gifts to your children; I alone received nothing. Is there nothing for me?"

"Nothing for you, my son!" exclaimed Maria Theresa, astonished. "Why, everything is yours, and therefore, I have nothing to give. Where your right is indisputable, my presents are superfluous."

"Yes, mother; but it does not become one so generous as you, to let her eldest son wait for an inheritance, when she might make him a handsome present of her own free will. Be generous, then, and give me something, too. I wish to be on an equality with the other children."

"Well, then, you grown-up child, what will you have?" asked the Empress, laughing. "Of course you have already chosen your gift, and it is mere gallantry on your part to beg for what you might take without leave. But let us hear. What is it? You have only to ask and have."

— "Indeed! May I choose my wedding-gift?"

— "Yes, you imperial beggar, you may."

"Well, then, give me the government claims upon the four lower classes."

The Empress looked aghast. "Is it money you desire?" said she. "Say how much, and you shall have it from my private purse. But do not rob the poor! The claim that you covet is the tax levied upon all the working classes, and you know how numerous they are."

"For that very reason, I want it. It is a princely gift. Shall I have it?"

The Empress reflected for a few moments. "I know," said she, looking up with one of her sweetest smiles, "I know that you will not misuse your power; for I remember the fate of your father's legacy, the three millions of coupons. You shall have the claim, my son. It is yours."

"Will your Majesty draw out the deed of gift?"

"I will, my son. It is *your* wedding-gift from our darling Antoinette.

But you will acquaint me, from time to time, with the use you are making of your power over the poor classes?"

"I will render my account to your Majesty. But first draw out the deed."

The Empress stepped to her *escritoire* and wrote a few lines, to which she affixed the imperial signature and seal.

"There it is," said she. "I bestow upon my son, the Emperor, all the government-claims to the impost levied upon the four lower classes. Will that do?"

"—It will, and from my heart I thank my dear mother for the gracious gift."

He took the hand of the Empress to kiss it, but she held his fast in her grasp, and looked at him with an expression of tenderness and anxiety.

"You are pale, my son," said she, affectionately. "I see that your heart is sad."

"And yet!" replied Joseph, with quivering lip, "I should rejoice, for I am about to have an angel in heaven."

"Poor little Theresa," murmured the Empress, while the tears rose to her eyes. "She has never been a healthy child. Isabella calls her hence."

"Yes," replied Joseph, bitterly; "She calls my child away, that she may break the last link that bound her to me."

"We must believe, my child, that it is for the best. The will of God, however painful its manifestations, is holy, wise, and merciful. Isabella declared to us that she would call the child when it had reached its seventh year. She goes to her mother, and now this bitter dream, of your early love, is past. Perhaps your heart may awaken once more to love. There are many beautiful princesses in Europe, and not one of them would refuse the hand of the Emperor of Austria. It is for you to choose, and no one shall dictate your choice."

"Would your Majesty convert me into a Bluebeard?" cried Joseph, coloring. "Do you not see that I murder my wives? Enough, that two of them are buried in the Chapel of the Capuchins, and that to-morrow, perhaps, my child will join them. Leopold has given an heir to my throne, and I am satisfied."

"Why do you talk of a successor, my son?" said the Empress, "you who are so young?"

"Your Majesty, I am old," replied Joseph, mournfully. "So old that I have no hope of happiness on earth. You see that to-day, when you have been so gracious, I am too wretched to do ought but thank you for your splendid gift. Let me retire then to my unhappy solitude, I am not fit to look upon your sweet and honored countenance. I must exile myself until my trial is past."

He left the room, and hastening to his cabinet, "now," exclaimed he, "now for my mother's gift."

He sat down and wrote as follows:

"MY DEAR PRINCE KAUNITZ—By the enclosed you will see that the Empress, my mother, has presented me with all the government-claims upon the working classes. Will you make immediate arrangements to acquaint the collectors with the following :

'No tax shall be collected from the working-classes during the remainder of my life.

JOSEPH.'**

"Now," thought he, as he laid aside his pen, "this document will gladden many a heart, and it will, perchance, win forgiveness for my own weakness. But why should monarchs have hearts of flesh, like other men, since they have no right to feel, to love, or to grieve? Be still, throbbing heart, that the Emperor may forget himself to remember his subjects! Yes, my subjects—my children—I will make you happy! I will——"

There was a light tap at the door, and the governess of the little Archduchess, Maria Theresa, entered the room.

"I have come," said she, in a faltering voice, "to announce to your Majesty, that the Princess has breathed her last."

The Emperor made no reply. He motioned the lady to retire, and bowing his head, gave way to one long burst of grief.

For hours he sat there, solitary and broken-hearted. At length the paroxysm was over. He raised his head, and his eyes were tearless and bright.

"It is over!" exclaimed he, in clear and unfaltering tones. "The past is buried; and I am born anew to a life whereof the aim shall be Austria's greatness and her people's welfare. I am no more a husband, no more a father. Austria shall be my bride, and every Austrian my child."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFERENCE.

GREAT excitement prevailed at Neustadt. All work was suspended, all the shops were shut, and although it was not Sunday, the people, in their holiday attire, seemed to have cast away all thought of the wants, the cares, and the occupations of every day life.

For, although it was not Sunday, it was a holiday. A holiday for Neustadt, since this was the birth-day of Neustadt's fame. For hundreds of years the little village had existed in profound obscurity, its

simple inhabitants dreaming away their lives far from the clamor of the world and its vicissitudes. Their slumbers had been disturbed by the seven year's war, when many a father, son, husband and lover had fought and fallen on its blood-thirsty battle-field. But with the return of peace came insignificance, and villagers of Neustadt went on dreaming as before.

To-day, however, on the 3d of September, in the year 1770, they were awakened by an event which gave to Neustadt a place in history. The two greatest Potentates in Germany were to meet there, to bury their past enmity, and pledge to each other the right-hand of fellowship.

These two Potentates were the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia. It was, therefore, not surprising that all Neustadt should be out of doors to witness the baptism of Neustadt's celebrity.

The streets were thronged with well-dressed people, the houses were hung with garlands and wreathes, the church-bells were ringing, and all the dignitaries of the town had turned out to witness the pageant.

And now the moment had arrived. The thunder of cannon, the shouts of the people, who thronged the avenue that led to the palace, and the clang of martial music announced the approach of the Emperor, whom his people were frantic to welcome.

He came—this young man, upon the jet-black Arabian, who rode ahead of those glittering nobles—this was the Emperor Joseph, the hope of Austria.

A thousand voices rent the air with shouts, while Joseph smiled and bowed and raised his eyes to the balconies, whence showers of boquets were falling around him.

He was inclining his head when a wreath of red roses and orange flowers, aimed by some skilful hand, fell directly upon his saddle-bow. He smiled, and taking up the wreath, looked around to see whence it came. Suddenly his eye brightened and his countenance expressed increased interest, while he reined in his horse that he might look again at a lady who was leaning over a balcony just above him. Her tall and elegant figure was clothed in a dress of black velvet, closed from her white throat to her round waist, by buttons of large and magnificent diamonds, whose brilliancy was almost dazzling. Her youthful and beautiful face was colorless with that exquisite and delicate pallor which has no affinity to ill health, but resembles the spiritual beauty of a marble statue. Her glossy, black hair defined the exquisite oval of that fair face as a rich frame sets off a fine painting. On her head she wore a diadem of brilliants, which confined a rich black lace veil, that fluttered like a dark cloud around her graceful figure. Her countenance wore an expression of profound sadness, and her large, lustrous eyes were riveted with an earnest gaze, upon the Emperor.

He bowed to his saddle-bow, but she did not seem to recognise the compliment, for her glance and her sadness were unchanged.

"The wreath is not from her," thought Joseph, with a feeling of disappointment, but as he turned for one more look at her lovely face, he

remarked a boquet, which she wore in her bosom. It was similar to the wreath which he held. The same white orange-blossoms and red roses, fastened together by the same white and red ribbon, whose long streamers were now fluttering in the wind.

A triumphant smile overspread the features of the Emperor, as blushing, he bowed again and passed on. But his face no longer wore its expression of careless gratification. He grew absent and thoughtful; he forgot to return the greetings of the people, and vainly the ladies, who crowded window and balcony, threw flowers in his way or waved their handkerchiefs in greeting. He saw nothing but the beautiful vision in the black veil, and wondered whence she came and what could be the hidden meaning of the red and white flowers which she wore and gave to him.

He was glad when the pageant of his entry into Neustadt was over, and dismounting quickly, he entered the palace, followed by Fieldmarshal Lacy and Count Rosenberg.

The people looked after them and shouted anew. But their attention was directed from the Emperor to a carriage, driven by four horses, which, advancing in the very centre of the brilliant cortege, seemed to contain some imperial personage, for the staff were around it, as though forming its escort. The curtains of the carriage were all drawn so that nothing could be seen of its occupant.

Who could it be? A woman, of course; since no man would dare to be driven while the Emperor of Austria rode. It could be no other than the Empress Maria Theresa, who had taken the journey to Neustadt, that she might look, face to face, upon her celebrated opponent, and offer him her own hand in pledge of future good understanding.

While the populace hoped and speculated, the mysterious equipage arrived before the palace gates. The rich-liveried footmen sprang from the rumble, and stationed themselves at the door of the coach. The two others, who were seated on the box, did likewise, bringing with them as they alighted on the ground, a roll of rich Turkey carpeting which they laid, with great precision, from the carriage to the palace steps.

Then the people were convinced that it was the Empress. Who but the sovereign lady of Austria and Hungary would walk the streets upon a carpet of such magnificence? And they thronged nearer, eager to catch the first glance of their beloved and honored Empress.

The carpet was laid without a wrinkle. One of the footmen opened the carriage door, while another approached the fore-wheel.

"She comes! she comes!" cried the populace, and they crowded around in eager delight.

One foot was put forward. Not a foot encased in a satin slipper, but a foot in a buckled shoe, which glistening, though it was, with diamonds, was not that of an Empress. The occupant of the carriage was a man.

"A man!" exclaimed the bystanders, astounded. Yes. Here he came, wrapped up in a bear-skin, which, on this warm summer day, was

enough to dissolve an ordinary human being into vapor. Not content with his wrapping, his hands were encased in a huge muff, which he held close to his face, that he might not inhale one single breath of the air that was refreshing everybody else. His head was covered by a hood which concealed his face, of which nothing was visible save a pair of light blue eyes.

When he had disappeared within the palace doors, the footmen rolled up the carpet and replaced it on the coach-box.

The populace, who had been looking on in speechless wonder, now began to laugh and whisper. Some said it was the King of the North Pole; others declared it was an Arctic bear; others again thought the gentleman had started for Siberia and had lost his way. Finally the desire to know who he was grew uncontrollable, and thronging around his lackeys the people shouted out,

“Who is he? Tell us, who is he?”

The lackeys, with the gravity of heralds-at-arms, shouted out in return,

“This is his Highness Prince Kaunitz, Prime Minister of their Majesties, the Empress Maria Theresa and the Emperor Joseph of Austria!”

CHAPTER IX.

KAUNITZ.

“What an abominable idea!” exclaimed prince Kaunitz, as perfectly exhausted from his journey he fell into an arm-chair in his own room. “What an abominable idea, to undertake this journey! These German roads are as rough and uncouth as the Germans themselves, and I only wonder that we have arrived without breaking our ribs!”

“It would certainly have been more convenient,” said Baron Binder, “if the King of Prussia had visited us in Vienna.”

Kaunitz turned his large eyes full upon his friend.

“I suppose,” said he, “that you jest Binder; for you *must* know that it is never safe to have your enemy under your own roof.”

“Your Highness, then, has no confidence in the protestations of love that are going on between the Emperor and the King?”

The Prince made no reply. He was looking at himself in a mirror, criticising his toilet which had just been completed by the expert Hypolyte. Apparently it was satisfactory, for he looked up and spoke.

“You are a grown-up child, Binder; you stare and believe everything. Have you not yet learned that statesmanship recognises nothing but interest? To-day it is to the interest of Frederic to squeeze our hands

and protest that he loves us; to-morrow, (if he can,) he will put another Silesia in his royal pocket. We, too, have found it convenient to write him a love-letter or two; but to-day, if we could, we would pluck off his crown, and make him a little Marquis again! Our intimacy reminds me of a sight I once saw while we were in Paris. It was a cage, in which animals, naturally antagonistic, were living in a state of perfect concord. A dog and cat were dining sociably together from one plate, and not far off, a turkey-hen was comfortably perched upon the back of a fox, who, so far from betraying any symptom of appetite for the turkey, looked quite oblivious of her proximity. I gave the keeper a louis d'or, and he told me his secret. The dog's teeth were drawn, and the cat's claws were pared off; this, of course, forced both to keep the peace. As for the turkey-hen, she was fastened to the back of the fox with fine wire, and this was the secret of her security.

"Ah!" cried Binder, laughing, "this is the history of many a human alliance. How many foxes I have known who carried their hens upon their backs, and made believe to love them, because they dared not do otherwise."

"Peace, Binder, my story is not yet ended. One morning the dog and the cat were found dead in *their* corner; and in the other, the fox lay bleeding and moaning, while of the hen, nothing remained save her feathers. Time—the despot that rules us all, had outwitted the keeper and asserted the laws of nature. The cat's claws had grown out and so had the dog's teeth. The fox, after much pondering over his misfortunes, had discovered the reason why he could not reach the hen; and this done, he worked at the wires until they broke. Of course he revenged himself on the spot by gobbling her up; but in his wrath at the wires, he had thrust them so deeply into his own flesh that the wounds they made upon his body caused his death. And so ended the compulsory alliance of four natural enemies."

"Does your Highness apply that anecdote to us?" asked Binder.—
"Are we to end like the cat and the dog?"

"For the present," said Kaunitz, thoughtfully, "our teeth and claws are harmless. We must wait until they have grown out again!"

"Your Highness, then, assigns us the *role* of the dog?"

"Certainly. I leave it to Prussia to play the cat—she has scratched us more than once, and even to-day when she covers her paws with velvet, I feel the claws underneath. I came hither to watch her. I am curious to know what it is in Frederic that has so bewitched the young Emperor of Austria."

"It would appear that his Majesty of Prussia has extraordinary powers of fascination. No one can resist him."

"I shall resist him," said Kaunitz, "for against his fascinations I am defended by the talisman of our mutual hate."

"Do not say so, your Highness. The King of Prussia may fear, but he cannot hate you. And did he not make it a special request that you should accompany the Emperor?"

“He did; and however disinclined I might be to accept his invitation, I have come lest he should suppose that I am afraid to encounter his eagle eyes.* I fear *him!* He intimidate me!—It is expedient for the present that Austria and Prussia should be *quasi*-allies, for in this way peace has been secured to Europe. But my system of diplomacy, which the Empress has made her own, forbids me to make any permanent alliance with a Prince who lives politically from hand to mouth, and has no fixed line of policy.† No—I do not fear him; for I see through his hypocritical professions, and in spite of his usurped crown, I feel myself to be more than his equal. If he has won thirteen victories on the battle-field, I have fought twice as many in the cabinet, where the fight is hand to hand, and the victor conquers without an army. On this field he will scarcely dare to encounter me. If he does, he will find his master for once!”

“Yes,” repeated Kaunitz emphatically, “he will find his master in me. I have never failed to make other men subservient to my schemes, and the King of Prussia shall grace my triumph with the rest. He is the vassal of Austria, and I will be the one to force him back to his allegiance. It is scandalous that this petty King should have been suffered to play an important part in European affairs. I will drive him from his accidental grandeur, and he shall return to his duty. I will humble him if I can, for this King of Prussia is the only man in Europe who has denied me the honors and consideration due me as a politician and a Prince.”‡

While Kaunitz spoke, his marble face grew animated, and his eyes glowed with the fire of hate.

“Nay, Prince!” exclaimed Binder, anxious to subdue the fiend that was rising in his friend’s heart, “everybody knows that you are the coachman of Europe, and that it is in the power of no man to wrest the reins from your hands.”

“May this Prussian ride behind as my footman!” cried Kaunitz, gnashing his teeth. “Oh, I know him! I know why he pays a million of subsidy annually to his accomplice, the virtuous Catharine, that she may continue her assaults upon Poland and Turkey! I know whither his longings travel; but when he stretches his hand out for the booty, we too will be there to claim our share, and he shall yield it.”

“Your Highness speaks in riddles,” said Binder, shrugging his shoulders. “I am accustomed, as you know, to look through your political spectacles; and I beg you to explain, for I am perfectly at a loss to understand you.”

The countenance of Kaunitz had resumed its impassable look. He threw back his head, and fixed his cold heartless blue eyes upon the Baron.

“Do you know,” said he, “what William the Silent once said of him-

* Ferrand’s History of Dismemberment of Poland; vol. 1, page 103.

† Kaunitz’s own words. See Ferrand, vol. 1, page 69.

‡ Kaunitz’s own words. Ferrand. vol. 1, page 104.

self? 'If I knew that my night-cap had found out my thoughts, I would throw it in the fire.'—Now, Binder, do not aim to be my night-cap, or I shall burn you to a cinder.—But enough of this. It would seem that the Emperor Joseph expects me to wait upon him. Well—if it please him that I should make the first visit, I will humor him. When a man feels that he is lord and master of another, he can afford to be condescending! I will indulge the Emperor's whim."

He rang, and one of his valets entered the room.

"Is his Majesty in the castle?"

"Yes, your Highness. His Majesty has been reviewing the troops."

"Where is his Majesty now?"

"He is with his suite in the parlor that overlooks the square."

"Is it far from this room?"

"No, your Highness. It is close by."

"Then reach me a cloak and muff, and woe to you if I encounter a draught on my way!"

CHAPTER X.

SOUVENIR D'EPERIES.

THE Emperor stood in the centre of the room, in lively conversation with the gentlemen of his suite. As Kaunitz entered, he stopped at once and, coming forward, received the Prince with a cordial welcome.

Kaunitz replied by a low bow, and nodded slightly to Prince de Ligne and General Lacy.

"Your Highness is just in time," said the Emperor. "These gentlemen need encouragement. They have been blushing and trembling like two young *débutantes*."

"Before whom, your Majesty?"

"Oh!—before the great Frederic, of course. And de Ligne, who is considered the most elegant man in Vienna, actually trembled more than anybody else."

"Oh, actors trembling before their manager!" said Kaunitz with a slight shrug. "Compose yourselves, gentlemen; the King of Prussia is too much absorbed in his own *rôle* to take any notice of you."

"That is right," cried the Emperor. "Encourage the *débutantes*, Prince!"

"I scarcely think that the Prince will succeed where your Majesty has failed," said General Von Lacy proudly.

"And his Highness will hardly have any time to devote to us, for

doubtless he too is practising the *rôle* which he must play before the King of Prussia," added de Ligne.

"I beg to impress upon the Prince de Ligne," interrupted Kaunitz, "that the verb 'must' is one which I am well accustomed to conjugate for others, but never allow others to conjugate for me."

"I for one have had it conjugated for *me* by your Highness," said the Emperor laughing. "Nobody in Austria knows it in all its moods and tenses better than I. But I have always recognised you as my teacher, and hope always to remain your faithful pupil."

The clouds which were gathering on Kaunitz's brow now shifted to the faces of Lacy and de Ligne.

"I have nothing to teach your Majesty," replied Kaunitz, almost smiling; "but allow me as a faithful servant to offer you a suggestion. Present to the King of Prussia that beautiful wreath which you hold in your hand, as an emblem of the friendship which to-day we pledge to Prussia."

"Not I," cried Joseph, while he held up his wreath and admired its white and red roses. "I shall keep my bouquet were it only for the sake of the beautiful donor. You, Prince, who penetrate all things, have pity on me, and find out her name."

"Your Majesty saw her then?"

"Saw her?" Yes, by Aphrodite, I did, and never in my life did I see a lovelier woman. She stood there in her velvet dress and veil, looking for all the world like the queen of night, of starry night. You see how she has impressed me, since I, who am so prosaic, launch out into extravagance of speech to describe her."

"She was in mourning?" asked Kaunitz thoughtfully.

"Clothed in black, except the diamonds that sparkled on her bodice, and the bouquet (a match to mine) which she wore in her bosom. Ah, your Highness, how you look at my poor flowers as if treason were lurking among their leaves!"

"It is a beautiful bouquet," said Kaunitz, eyeing it critically, "and very peculiar. Will your Majesty allow me to examine it?"

The Emperor handed over the wreath. "Take it," said he, "but be merciful to my pretty delinquents."

Kaunitz took the flowers and looked at them as he would have done at any other thing that might be the links in a chain of evidence, and passed his slender, white fingers through the long ribbons that fastened them together.

"The lady who threw these flowers is a Pole," said he after a pause.

"How do you know that?" cried the Emperor.

"It is certainly not accidental that the wreath should be composed of white and red roses, and tied with a knot of white and red ribbons. White and red, you remember, are the colors of the so-called Republic of Poland."

"You are right!" exclaimed Joseph, "and she wears mourning be-

cause a noble woman must necessarily grieve for the sufferings of her bleeding country."

"Look," said Kaunitz, who meanwhile was opening the leaves and searching among them, "here is a paper. Does your Majesty permit me to draw it out?"

"Certainly. I gave you the wreath to examine, and you shall have the benefit of all that you discover."

Kaunitz bowed his thanks and began to untwist the stems of the flowers. The Emperor and his two courtiers looked on with interest.

The Prince drew forth a little folded paper and reached it over to the Emperor.

"Have the goodness, your Majesty, to read it yourself. A declaration of love from a lady is not intended for my profane eyes."

The Emperor sighed. "No," said he, "it is no declaration for me; I am not so happy. Read it, your Highness, read it aloud."

Kaunitz unfolded the paper and read: "*Souvenir d'Epèries.*"

"Nothing more?" asked Joseph.

Kaunitz replied by handing him the note.

"How strange! Only these words, and no explanation! I cannot understand it."

"These words prove my supposition, your Majesty. The donor is a Polish lady and one of the Confederates."

"You think so?"

"I am convinced of it. When your Majesty was travelling in Hungary, did you not spend a day at Epèries, and honor the Confederates by receiving them both publicly and privately?"

"I did," replied Joseph warmly, "and it gladdened my heart to assure these brave struggling patriots of my sympathy."

"Did not your Majesty go so far as to promise them mediation with Prussia and Russia?"*

"I did," replied the Emperor with a faint blush.

"Well, then, this female Confederate meant to remind you of your promise on the day when you are to hold a conference with Frederic," said Kaunitz, allowing the wreath to slip through his fingers to the floor. "There, your Majesty," continued he, "your beautiful Pole is at your feet. Will you rescue her or unite in crushing her to the earth?"

"Oh, I will rescue her," replied Joseph, "that she may not fall into the hands of ambitious Catharine. It would give her great pleasure to deck her Muscovite head with these sweet Polish roses, but she shall not have them."

With these words, and before his courtiers could anticipate his action the Emperor stooped and picked up the wreath.

"Have a care, your Majesty," said the wary Kaunitz, "how you espouse Polish quarrels. The Poles are unlucky. They can die like men, but they do not live like men. Beware of Polish roses, for their perfume is not wholesome."

* Ferrand: vol. 1, page 79.

Just then, a shout was heard in the distance, and the Emperor hastened to the window.

"It is the King of Prussia!" cried he joyfully, and he walked towards the door.

Prince Kaunitz took the liberty of going immediately up and interposing his tall person between Joseph and the doorway.

"Your Majesty," said he reproachfully, "what are you about to do?"

"I am about to go forward to meet the King of Prussia. He is just descending from his carriage—do not detain me," replied Joseph hastily.

"But has your Majesty forgotten that at Neisse, when the King of Prussia was the host, he came no further than the stairway to meet you? It is not seemly that Austria should condescend to Prussia.

"My dear Prince," said the Emperor with a peculiar laugh, "it is your business to respect these conventions. It is mine to regulate them. As the *little* Sovereign of Austria, I hasten to do homage to the *great* King of Prussia." And gently putting the Minister aside, the Emperor walked rapidly out, followed by his suite.

Kaunitz looked after him with stormy brow. "Incorrigible fanatic!" said he to himself. "Will you never cease to butt your empty head against the wall! You will butt in vain as long as I have power and life!—Go—it befits such a little Emperor as you to humble yourself before your great King; but Austria is represented in *my* person, and I remain here!"

He looked around the room, and his eyes fell upon the wreath which the Emperor had laid by the side of his hat on the table. A sneer overspread his countenance as he went towards it and shook off some of the leaves, which were already fading.

"How soon they fall!" said he. "I think that the glorious Republic will be quite as short-lived as they. Meanwhile I shall see that the '*Souvenir d'Epèries*' lives no longer than roses have a right to live."

He left the room resolved to find out who it was that had bestowed the wreath; "for," thought he, "she may prove a useful instrument with which to operate on either side."

CHAPTER XI.

FREDERIC THE GREAT.

WITH youthful ardor, unconscious that his head was uncovered, the Emperor hurried down the staircase into the street. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, his eyes fixed upon the spot whence the King

was advancing, the Emperor rushed onwards, for the first time in his life slighting the people who thronged around, full of joy at sight of his elegant and handsome person.

Frederic was coming with equal rapidity, and now in the very centre of the square the Monarchs met.

At this moment all was quiet. The military, ranged in lines around the square, were glistening with gold lace and brightened arms. Behind them came the people, who far and near were seen flowing in one great stream towards the square, while on the balconies and through the open windows of the houses around richly-dressed matrons and beautiful maidens enclosed the scene, like one long wreath of variegated flowers.

They met, and in the joy of his youthful enthusiasm the Emperor threw himself into the arms of the King of Prussia and embraced him with a tenderness that was almost filial. The King returned the caress, and pressed the young monarch to his heart.

While the King of Prussia had been advancing, the people in silence were revolving in their minds the blood, the treasure, the long years of struggle which Austrians had owed to this warlike Frederic. But when they saw how Joseph greeted him, they forgot everything, and he now seemed to their excited imaginations to come like a resplendent sun of Peace, whose rays streamed far into the distance of a happy and prosperous futurity.

It was Peace! Peace! The hope of Peace that filled every eye with tears, and bowed every unconscious knee in prayer to Almighty God.

From the midst of the kneeling multitude, a voice was heard to cry out, "Long live Peace!" A thousand other voices echoed the words, "Long live Peace!"

"Long live the Emperor and the King!" cried the same voice; and now the air was rent with shouts, while from street and square and from every house, the cry went up to heaven, "Long live the Emperor! Long live the King!"

Frederic withdrew from Joseph's embrace, and bowed to the multitude with that bright and fascinating smile which no one was ever known to resist.

He then turned to the Emperor, and presenting the young Prince of Prussia and the two Princes of Brunswick, he pointed to the white uniforms which they wore and said: "Sire, I bring you some new recruits.* We are all desirous of serving under your banner. And we feel that it would be an honor, continued he, looking around the square, "to be the companions-in-arms of your Majesty's soldiers, for each man looks like a true son of Mars."

"If so," replied the Emperor, "they have reason to rejoice, since to-day they are permitted, for the first time, to do homage to their father."

Frederic smiled, and taking Joseph's arm, they walked together to the palace. The King was conducted at once to the apartments prepared

*The King wore the Austrian uniform, embroidered with silver. The Princes and the King's suite also wore it.

for his occupation, whence he shortly after emerged to join the noble company assembled in the hall that led into the dining-room.

The brilliant suite of the Emperor were awaiting the princely pair, and when they entered the hall together, followed by the *cortège*, of Prussia, every head bowed with deferential awe, and every eye sought the ground. One head only bent slightly, and one pair of eyes looked boldly into the face of Frederic the Great.

The eagle eye of the King remarked him at once, and with an affable smile, he approached the haughty Minister.

"I rejoice, at last, to meet Prince Kaunitz face to face," said he, in his soft and musical voice. "We need no introduction to one another. I am not such a barbarian as to require that he should be pointed out to me whom all Europe knows, admires and respects."

Something happened to which Kaunitz was totally unaccustomed—he blushed. In spite of himself he smiled and bowed very, very low; but he found no words wherewith to reply to Frederic's flattering address.

"Sire," said the Emperor, coming to the rescue, "you are making the most self possessed men in Austria grow speechless with ecstasy. Even Kaunitz is at a loss to answer you, and as for poor De Ligne, he is completely dazzled. But, by and by, he will get accustomed to the sun's splendor, and then he will recover his accustomed address."*

"I know him well," said Frederic, with another bewitching smile. "I have read your letter to Jean Jacques Rousseau, Prince; and I know it to be genuine, for it is too beautiful to be a forgery."

"Ah, Sire!" replied De Ligne, "I am not of such renown that obscure writers should seek to forge *my* name."†

The King bowed, and turned to Fieldmarshal Von Lacy.

"Your Majesty need not present this man either," said he, laying his hand upon Lacy's shoulder, "he has given me entirely too much trouble for me not to be familiar with his features. I have good reason to remember Von Lacy and to rejoice that he is not Quartermaster-General to-day; for in that capacity, I and my soldiers have suffered enough from him."

"But where is Loudon?" asked the Emperor. "He is very late to-day."

"That is not his habit," replied Frederic, quickly, "I have seldom been able to come upon the field as soon as he. But, sire, we have done him injustice, for he is here, punctual as though he awaited his enemies, not his friends."

Crossing over to Loudon, and disregarding his stiff demeanor, Frederic took his hand, and greeted him with the most cordial expressions of regard.

"If it be agreeable to your Majesty," said the Emperor, as the doors were flung open, "we will proceed to dinner." And he offered his arm.

*The Emperor's words. Conversations with Frederic the Great by Prince de Ligne, page 11.

† Not long before this, a letter had been written to Jean Jacques, and signed with the king's name. The writer of this letter was Horace Walpole.

Frederic took it but he still kept his eyes upon Loudon. "Sire," said he to Joseph, "if I am to have the honor of setting beside your Majesty at the table, pray let me have Loudon on the other side. I would much rather have him there than opposite I feel safer."

So saying, the King walked on, and the company passed into the dining-room.

"If he turns the heads of all the court with his flattery," muttered Kaunitz, following just after the princely pair, "he shall not succeed with me. What fine things to be sure! But flattery indiscriminately bestowed leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. He wishes Loudon for his neighbor, forsooth, as if a man could have any rational intercourse with such an ignorant, ill-bred, awkward dolt as he is!"

And Kaunitz, who was secretly chagrined at the choice of the King, took the seat which had been assigned to him by the Emperor. It was at Joseph's own table, directly opposite the two Sovereigns.

"Ah!" exclaimed Frederic, laughing and nodding to Kaunitz, "now I am satisfied. If I would rather have Loudon beside me, I would rather have the greatest statesman in Europe before me, for it is only when I can see him that I feel quite safe from his diplomatic grasp—I take shelter under your Highness's eye. Be indulgent to an old soldier, whose sword has so often been struck from his hands by your magic pen."

"Your Majesty's pen is as sharp as your sword," replied Kaunitz, "and the world has learned to fear and admire the one as much as the other. We offer resistance to neither; but pay willing homage to the Prince who is at once a statesman, an author and a warrior."

The Emperor whispered to Frederic. "Sire, a compliment from Kaunitz, is like the flower upon the aloe. It blooms once in a century."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRIMA DONNA.

THE festivities of the first day were concluded with a ballet. Great preparations had been made for the reception of the King of Prussia. Noverre, with his dancers, and Florian Gassman, with his opera corps, had been summoned to Neustadt. They came with twenty wagons laden with scenery, coulisses, machinery and costumes, all of which was intended to prove to Frederic, that although the court of Berlin was the acknowledged seat of literature and the fine arts, Vienna was not altogether forsaken by the Muses.

"Your Majesty must be indulgent to our theatrical efforts," said the

Emperor, as they took their seats in the box which had been prepared for their occupation. "We all know that in Berlin, the Muses and Graces have their home; they seldom visit Vienna, for they are loyal, and love to sit at the feet of their master."

"Ah, sire, you speak of the past. Time was, when the Muses were not unpropitious, but now that I am an old man, they have proved inconstant, and have fled from Sans-Souci forever. The Muses, themselves, are young, and it is but natural that they should seek your Majesty's protection. I am thankful, through your intervention, to be admitted once more to Parnassus.

Just as the King was about to seat himself, he remarked Kaunitz, who with his usual grave indifference, was advancing to a chair not far off.

Frederic turned smilingly to Joseph. "Your Majesty and I," said he, "might stand to-night as representatives of youthful and aged sovereignty. We both need wisdom in our councils. Let us invite Prince Kaunitz to sit between us."

The Emperor bowed, and beckoned to the Prince, who having heard distinctly what had been intended for his ears, could not suppress a momentary expression of exultation. Never in his life had he made a bow so profound as that with which he took the seat which a King had resigned to him. He was so exultant that in the course of the evening he was actually heard to laugh!

The ballet began. Gods and goddesses fluttered about the stage, Muses and Graces grouped themselves together in attitudes of surpassing beauty, and finally, with one grand tableau, composed of all the dancers, the curtain fell.

After the ballet came a concert. It was to open with an air from Gluck's opera, of *Alceste*, sung in costume, by the celebrated Bernasconi.

The orchestra played the introduction, and the curtain rose, but the Prima Dona did not appear. The leader looked towards the coulisses, but in vain, and the audience began to express their impatience in audible murmurs. The curtain fell slowly, and the Marshal of the Emperor's household, coming forward, spoke a few words to Joseph in a low voice.

He turned to the King. "Sire, I have to apologise to you for this unlucky *contretems*. Signora Bernasconi has been taken suddenly sick."

"Oh," replied Frederic, laughing, "I am quite *au fait* to the sudden illness of prima donnas. But since I have ordered a half month's salary to be withdrawn from every singer who falls sick on a night of representation, my *cantatrices* at Berlin enjoy unprecedented health."

"Bernasconi must have been made sick by her anxiety to appear well in your Majesty's critical eyes."

"Do not believe it. These princesses of the stage are more capricious than veritable princesses. Above all the Italians."

"But Bernasconi," said Kaunitz, "is not an Italian. She belongs to a noble Polish family."

"So much the worse," laughed Frederic. "That Polish blood is for-

ever boiling over. I am surprised that your Highness should permit your director to give to a Polish woman a rôle of importance. Wherever the Poles go, they bring trouble and strife."

"Perhaps so, sire," replied Kaunitz; "but they are excellent actors, and no people understand better how to represent heroes." As he said this, Kaunitz drew out his jewelled snuff-box, enriched with a medallion portrait of his imperial mistress, Maria Theresa.

"To *represent* heroes, I grant you; but just as we are beginning to feel an interest in the spectacle of their heroism, lo! the stage-armor falls off, the tin sword rattles, and we find that we were wasting our sympathies upon a band of play-actors."

"Perhaps," said Kaunitz, as he dipped his long white fingers into the snuff-box, "perhaps we may live to see the stage break under them, and then they may cease to be actors, and become lunatics."

Frederic's eagle eyes were fixed upon Kaunitz while he spoke, but the Minister still continued to play with his snuff-box.

"Prince," said he, laughing, "we have been antagonists for so many years that we must celebrate our first meeting by a pledge of future good-will. The Indians are accustomed at such times to smoke the calumet of peace. Here we have tobacco under another form. Will you allow me a pinch from your snuff-box?"

This was a token of such great condescension that even the haughty Kaunitz was seen to blush with gratified vanity. With unusual eagerness, he presented his snuff-box to the King.

The King took the snuff, and as he did so, remarked, "This is the first time I have ever taken snuff from another man's box!"

"Pardon me, your Majesty," replied Kaunitz, quickly. "Silesia was a pinch from our snuff-box."

"True," said Frederic, laughing, "but the tobacco was so strong that it has cost me many an uncomfortable sneeze; and nobody has ever been civil enough to say 'Heaven bless you.'"

While the King and Kaunitz jested together, Signor Tobaldi had been singing his Aria; and now that he ceased, Frederic, for the first time, became aware that any music had been going on.

"Your Majesty," said the Emperor, "has done injustice, for once, to a Prima Donna. Bernasconi is really sick, but she has sent a substitute."

"These substitutes," said Frederic, "are always on the look-out for such opportunities of sliding into notice, but unhappily they are not often equal to the tasks they are so eager to perform."

"This substitute," said Joseph, "is no rival opera-singer. She is a dear friend of Bernasconi's, who speaks of her singing with enthusiasm."

"Is that possible? Does one singer go into raptures over another? By all means let us hear the Phoenix."

The King looked towards the stage, and his countenance assumed, at once, an expression of genuine interest.

The orchestra once more began the introduction to Gluck's beautiful Aria. Meanwhile a tall and elegant person was seen to advance towards the foot-lights. She wore a pure Grecian robe, half covered with a mantle of purple velvet, richly embroidered in gold, which fell in graceful folds from her snowy shoulders. Her dark hair, worn in the Grecian style, was confined by a diadem of brilliants, and the short, white tunic which she wore under her mantle, was fastened by a girdle that was blazing with jewels.

She was so transcendantly beautiful that Frederic could not resist the temptation of joining in the applause which greeted her entrance. She seemed unconscious of the effect she produced, so earnestly and anxiously were her large, lustrous eyes fixed upon the spot where Frederic and Joseph were sitting together. She raised her graceful arms as she began the prayer of Alceste; but her looks were riveted upon the Sovereigns, who represent divinity on earth. When she sang, the tones of her glorious voice sank deep into the hearts of all who listened. Now it was clear, pure, and vibrating, wooing the air like a clarionet—now it caressed the ear like a speaking violin—and anon it poured forth volumes of harmony, that filled all space as the booming organ fills the aisles of a vast and lofty cathedral. Gluck, the hypercritical Gluck, would have been ravished to hear his music as she sang it; and Frederic, who, up to this hour, had refused to acknowledge the genius of the great German, now sat breathless with rapture, as he listened to such music and such interpretation of music as never had been heard before.

The Emperor Joseph was unmindful of it all. He had a vague idea of celestial sounds that seemed to drown him in an ocean of melody, but he heard not a note of Alceste's prayer. Every sense was stunned save one—and that one was sight.

"It is she," murmured he, as the syren ceased to sing; "it is she, the beautiful Pole. How resplendent she is in her beauty to-night!" Then turning to Kaunitz, whose observing eyes had been watching his face and whose sharp ears had caught his words, he whispered.

"Do you remember the boquet that was thrown to me this morning?"

"I forget nothing your Majesty deigns to communicate to me," replied Kaunitz.

"This is she. Who can she be?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Kaunitz, slightly elevating his eye-brows. "The '*Souvenir d'Eperies*'—Now I comprehend Bernasconi's illness. She fell ill through patriotism, that this adroit country woman of hers might have the opportunity of being remarked by your Majesty. I would not be at all surprised if she went out of the way of Prima Donnas to attract your Majesty's attention. These Polish women are fanatics in their love of country."

The Emperor said nothing in reply. He scarcely listened. His eyes were still upon the descending curtain that hid the mysterious beauty

from his sight. If her object had been to attract him, she had certainly succeeded.

The audience were waiting for some signal from either Joseph or Frederic that they might give vent to their admiration. The King understood the general feeling, and began to applaud with his hands. In a moment the applause became vociferous, and it did not cease until the curtain drew up a second time, and the Prima Donna came forward to receive her ovation.

For one moment they surveyed the enchanting singer, and then they broke out into another wild storm, in which the Emperor joined so heartily that his voice was heard above the din, crying out "*Bravo! Bravissima!*"

The singer sought his glance, and meeting it, blushed deeply. Then coming forward a few steps, she began once more to sing.

Her song was a passionate appeal to the two Princes, whom she addressed openly, in behalf of Poland.

It was over, and not a sound was heard in the theatre. The audience hung, in breathless anxiety, upon the verdict that must come from those who had been addressed. They were so intent upon Frederic and Joseph that they did not see the singer leave the stage. They were not destined, however, to be enlightened or relieved, for no demonstration was made in the imperial box.

But Joseph, rising from his seat, signed to the Marshal of the household to approach.

"Go, Count," said he, "go quickly, and ask her name. Tell her it is the Emperor who desires to know her."

"Her name is Poland," said Kaunitz, in an absent tone. Then addressing Joseph, he continued. "Did I not tell your Majesty that your adventure was not to end with the throwing of a bouquet? I know these Polish women, they coquette with everything—above all, with the throes of their dying fatherland."

The Emperor smiled, but said nothing. He was watching the return of the Marshal of the household.

"Well, Count, what is her name?" cried he earnestly.

"Sire, I am unable to find it out. The lady has left the theatre, and no one here, not even the director, knows her name."

"Strange," said the Emperor. "Let a messenger, then, be sent to Bernasconi: she, of course, must know."

"Pardon me, your Majesty, I have been to Bernasconi. She is here, preparing to sing her second air. She has suddenly recovered, and will have the honor of appearing before your Majesties in a few moments."

"But what said Bernasconi of the Polish singer?"

"She does not know her name, your Majesty. She showed me a letter from Colonel Dumourriez, the French Plenipotentiary to the Polish Republic. He designates her only as a Polish lady of noble birth, whose remarkable vocal powers were worthy of your Majesty's admiration."

"Do you hear that?" said Frederic to Kaunitz. "Do you hear that? The French Plenipotentiary sends this Prima Donna to sing before the Emperor. *Vraiment*, it seems that France is disgusted with war, and intends to try her hand at sentiment. Petticoat-government is so securely established there, that I suppose the French are about to throw the petticoat over the heads of their allies. France and Poland are two *femmes galantes*."

"Yes, sire," replied Kaunitz, "but one of them is old and ugly. *Madame La Pologne* is an old coquette who puts on youthful airs, and thinks she hides her wrinkles with paint."

"Does your Highness then believe that her youth is forever past? Can she never be rejuvenated?" asked Frederic, with a searching look at Kaunitz's marble features.

"Sire, people who waste their youth in dissipation and rioting have no strength when the day of real warfare dawns."

"And it would seem that the Empress of Russia has some intention of making a serious attack upon the poor old lady," said Frederic, while for the second time, he took a pinch from the snuff-box of the crafty Austrian.

Meanwhile the concert was going on. Bernasconi, completely restored, sang the beautiful air from Orpheus and Eurydice, and Frederic applauded as before. But the Emperor sat silent and abstracted. His thoughts were with that Polish woman whose love of country had brought her to Neustadt to remind him of the promises he had made to the Confederates at Eperies.

"How enthusiastically she loves Poland!" said he to himself. "She will of course find means to cross my path again, for she seeks to interest me in the fate of her Fatherland. The next time she comes I will do like the prince in the fairy tale, I will strew pitch upon the threshold, that she may not be able to escape from me again."

Kaunitz, too, was pre-occupied with thoughts of the bewitching Confederate, but the fact that she would be sure to come again was not quite so consoling to him as to Joseph.

As soon as he returned home, he called for his private secretary, who was one of the most dexterous detectives in Vienna.

"You will make enquiries at once as to the whereabouts of the prima donna who sang before me and their Majesties to-night. To-morrow at nine o'clock I must know who she is, where she lodges, and what is her business here."

CHAPTER XIII.

FREDERIC THE GREAT AND PRINCE KAUNITZ.

THE great review, which had been gotten up in honor of the King of Prussia, was over. In this review Frederic had become acquainted with the strength of the Austrian army, the superiority of its cavalry, and the military capacity of the Emperor who was its commander-in-chief.

The King had been loud in his praises of all three, and had embraced the Emperor in presence of the whole army.

Immediately after the review, Frederic sent a page to announce to Prince Kaunitz that he would be glad to see him in his own private apartments.

Kaunitz at once declared his readiness to wait upon the King, and to the unspeakable astonishment of his valet, had actually shortened his toilet and had betrayed some indifference to the arrangement of his *per-ruque*. As he left the room, his gait was elastic and active, and his countenance bore visible marks of the excitement with which he was looking forward to the coming interview.

But Kaunitz himself became suddenly aware of all this, and he set to work to force back his emotion. The nearer he came to the King's suite of rooms, the slower became his step and the calmer his mien. At last it was tranquilized, and the Minister looked almost as cold and indifferent as ever.

Arrived at the door of the ante-chamber, he looked around, and having convinced himself that no one was in sight, he drew from his breast-pocket a small mirror which he always wore about his person. Sharply he viewed himself therein, until gradually, as he looked, his face resumed the stony aspect which like a thickening haze concealed his emotions from other men's eyes.

"It is really not worth my while," thought he, "to get up an excitement because I am about to have a conference with that small bit of royalty, Frederic. If he should discover it, he might suppose that I, like the rest of the world, am abashed in the presence of a King because he has some military fame. No—no—what excites me is the fact that I am about to write a bit of history; for this interview between Prussia and Austria will be historical. It is the fate of Europe—that fate which I hold in my hands, that stirs me with such unwonted emotion. This King of Prussia has nothing to do with it. No doubt he hopes to hoodwink me with flattery, but I shall work him to *my* ends, and force him to that line of policy which I have long ago laid down for Austria's welfare."

Here the mirror was returned to his pocket, and he opened the door of the ante-room. The sweet sounds of a flute broke in upon his ear as he entered. The King's Aid-de-Camp came up and whispered that his sovereign was accustomed to play on the flute daily, and that he never failed even when in camp to solace his solitude with music.

Prince Kaunitz answered with a shrug, and pointing to the door, said, "Announce me to his Majesty."

The Aid-de-Camp opened the door and announced his Highness, Prince Kaunitz.

The flute ceased, and the rich, musical voice of Frederic was heard to say, "He can enter."

Kaunitz was not much pleased to receive a permission where he fancied himself entitled to an invitation, but he had no alternative, so he walked languidly forward while the officer held the door open.

"Shut the door and admit no one during the visit of Prince Kaunitz," said the King. Then turning to the Prince, he pointed to his flute. "I suspect you are amused to see such an old fellow as I coquetting with the fine arts, but I assure you that my flute is one of my trustiest friends. She has never deceived me, and keeps my secrets faithfully. My alliance with her is for life. Ask her and she will tell you that we live on terms of truest friendship."

—"Unhappily I do not understand the language of your lady-love. Your Majesty will perhaps allow me to turn my attention to another one of your feminine allies, towards whom I shall venture to question your Majesty's good faith."

"Of what lady do you speak?" cried Frederic eagerly.

"Of the Empress Catharine," replied Kaunitz, slightly inclining his head.

"Oh!" said the King, laughing, "you dart like an arrow to the point, and transfix me at once upon the barb of politics. Let us sit down then. The arm-chair which you are taking now may boast hereafter that it is the courser which has carried the greatest statesman in Europe to a field where he is sure to win new victories."

Kaunitz was careful to seat himself at the same time as the King, and they both sat before a table covered with charts, papers and books.

A short pause ensued. Both were collecting their energies for the strife. The King, with his eagle-eye, gazed upon the face of the astute diplomatist, while he, pretending not to see it, looked perfectly oblivious of Kings or Emperors.

"So you will ask of Catherine whether I am a loyal ally or not?" asked the King at last.

"Yes, sire, for unluckily the Empress of Russia is the one who can give me information."

"Why unluckily?"

"Because I grieve to see that a German Prince is willing to form alliances with her, who, if she could, would bring all Europe under her yoke, and make every European Sovereign her vassal. Russia grows

hourly more dangerous and more grasping. She fomented discord and incites wars, for she finds her fortune in the dissensions of other nations, and at every misunderstanding between other powers she makes a step towards the goal whither she travels."

"And what is that goal?"

"The subjugation of all Europe," cried Kaunitz, with unusual warmth. "Russia's policy is that of unprincipled ambition; and if so far she has not progressed in her lust of dominion, it is Austria, or rather the policy which I dictate to Austria, that has checked her advance. It is I who have restored the balance of power, by conquering Austria's antipathy to France, by isolating haughty England, and uniting all Europe against rapacious Russia. But Russia never loses sight of the policy initiated by Peter the Great, and as I have stemmed the tide of her aggression towards the west, it is overflowing towards the south and the east. All justice disregarding, Russian armies occupy Poland, and before long the ships of Russia will swarm in the Black Sea and threaten Constantinople. Russia is per force a robber, for she is internally exhausted, and unless she seeks new ports for her commerce, and new sources of revenue, she is ruined."

"You err, I assure you," cried Frederic, eagerly, "Russia is in a condition to sustain any burthen; her revenues this year show an increase over the last of five hundred thousand rubles."

"Then this increase comes probably from the million of subsidy which your Majesty has agreed to pay to Russia," said Kaunitz, bowing.* Such rich tribute may well give her strength to attempt anything; but every thaler which your Majesty pays into her treasury is a fire-brand which will one day consume all Europe. If indeed, as you say, Russia is strong and formidable, it is for your Majesty to hold her in check; if she is exhausted, her alliance is not worth having.†

"Your Highness seems eager to have me break off my connection with Russia," said the King, while a cloud passed over his face. "You wish to prove that Russia is a power whose friendship is worthless and whose enmity is to be despised. And yet it is well known to me how zealously the Austrian Ambassador was intriguing not long ago to induce Russia to cast me aside and enter into an alliance with you. Your Highness must excuse me if I throw aside the double-edged blade of courtly dissimulation. I am an old soldier and my tongue refuses to utter anything but unvarnished truth."‡

"If your Majesty permits," replied Kaunitz with some warmth, "I, too, will speak the unvarnished truth. You are pleased to charge me with seeking to alienate Russia from Prussia while striving to promote an alliance of the former with Austria. Will your Majesty allow me to reply to this accusation in full without interruption?"

"I will," replied Frederic, nodding his head. "Speak on, I shall not put in a word."

* Ferrand; History of the dismemberment of Poland, Vol. 1, p. 84.
 † Kaunitz's own words. Ferrand, vol. 1, page 108.

CHAPTER XIV

RUSSIA A FOE TO ALL EUROPE.

PRINCE KAUNITZ remained silent for a time, as though he were turning over in his mind what he should say to the King. Then slowly raising his head, he met the scrutinizing glance of Frederic with perfect composure, and spoke as follows :

“ At the conclusion of the unhappy war which desolated both Austria and Prussia, I had to consider what course for the future was likely to recuperate the prostrate energies of Austria. I resolved in my mind various schemes and laid them before her imperial Majesty. The one which I advocated and which was adopted by the Empress had mainly for its object the pacification of all European broils and the restoration of the various Austrian dependencies to order and prosperity. For some time I waited to see whether your Majesty would not seek to conciliate France, and renew your old league of friendship with her King. But the policy pursued by your Majesty at the Court of Russia convinced me that you were thinking exclusively of securing your provinces in the east. This once understood, it became the interest of Austria to rivet the links which bound her to France ; for an alliance with her offered the same advantages to us, as that of Russia did to Prussia. Moreover it was Austria’s opinion that Prussia was now too closely bound to Russia for her ever to seek an alliance with France. It therefore appeared that our good understanding with the latter would conduce to preserve the balance of power among European nations, and that it would meet with the favor of all those potentates who were anxious for peace. It follows thence that the court of Vienna is perfectly content with her relations towards France ; and I expressly and distinctly declare to your Majesty that we will never seek to alienate Russia from Prussia, that we will never encourage any advances from Russia, and that your Majesty may rest assured that we will never deviate from our present line of policy. This was what I desired to explain, and I thank your Majesty for the courtesy with which you have listened to me.”*

The face of the King, which at first had looked distrustful, was now entirely free from suspicion. He rose from his chair and giving his hand to Kaunitz, said with a cordial smile,

“ This is what I call noble and candid statesmanship. You have not spoken as a diplomatist but as a great minister who, feeling his strength,

* This discourse of Kaunitz’s is historical. It is found in Ferrand’s *Histoire des trois Dismembrement de la Pologne*. Tome 1. p. 112.

has no reason to conceal his actions. I will answer in the same spirit. Sit down again and hear me. You fear Russia, and think that if she gains too great an ascendancy among nations, she will use it to the detriment of all Europe. I agree with you, and I myself would view the aggrandizement of Russia under Catharine with disapprobation and distrust. You are right, and I feel the embarrassment of my present political condition. At the commencement of this Turkish war, I would have used my honest endeavors to check the usurping advances of Russia not only in Turkey but also in Poland. But I myself was in a critical position. You, who had been represented to me as the most rapacious of diplomatists, you had prejudiced all Europe against me, so that for seven long years my only allies were my rights and my good sword. The only hand reached out to me was that of Russia; policy constrained me to grasp and retain it. It is both to my honor and my interest that I keep faith with Russia, and eschew all shifts and tergiversations in my dealings with her. Her alliance is advantages to Prussia, and therefore I pay her large subsidies, give her advice, allow my officers to enlist in her armies, and finally I have promised the Empress that should Austria interfere in behalf of the Turks, I will use all my influence to mediate between you.”*

—“Does that mean that if Russia and Austria should go to war, your Majesty will stand by the former?”

—“It means that I will make every effort to prevent a war between Russia and Austria. If in spite of all that I could do there should be war between you, it would not be possible for Prussia to remain neutral. Were she to do so, she would deserve the contempt both of friend and foe. I would fulfil my obligations to Russia that I might secure the duration of our alliance. But I sincerely hope that it may be my good fortune to mediate with such results as will spare me the espousal of either party’s quarrel.”

“If so, Russia must abandon her ambitious projects in Turkey, and she must speedily consent to secure peace to Poland,” replied Kaunitz warmly.

The King smiled, and taking from the table a sealed packet, he presented it to Kaunitz.

“A letter for me!” exclaimed the Minister surprised.

“Yes, your Highness. A few moments before you came hither, a courier arrived from Constantinople with despatches for you and for me.”

—“Does your Majesty allow me to open them?”

—“I request you to read them while I read mine, which are, as yet, unopened. I have only read the report of my Ambassador at Constantinople. Let us see what news we have.”

The King, with a smiling inclination of the head, settled himself in his arm-chair, and began to read.

A long pause ensued. Both tried to seem absorbed in the dispatches from Turkey, yet each one gave now and then a hasty, furtive glance at

the other. If their eyes met, they were quickly cast down again, and so they continued to watch and read until there was no more excuse for silence.

"Bad news from Turkey," said Frederic, speaking first, and putting down his letters.

"The Porte has been unfortunate," said Kaunitz, shrugging his shoulders and looking perfectly indifferent. "Russia has not only gained a great victory on land, but has defeated him at sea, and has burnt his fleet."

"The consequence of all this is, that Turkey now turns to Austria and Prussia for help," replied the King. Upon our intervention now, hangs the peace of all Europe. We have a most important mission to perform."

"Your Majesty intends to undertake it?" asked Kaunitz, carelessly.

—"I am resolved to do all that I can to prevent war. It is such a terrible scourge, that no nation has a right to fold her hands and see its horrors, if by any step of hers it can be averted or stopped. Turkey asks for intervention, that she may be restored to the blessings of peace. Shall we refuse her?"

"Austria cannot mediate in this affair unless Russia first proposes it," said Kaunitz, in a listless tone. The Court of Vienna cannot make propositions to Russia. It, therefore, rests with your Majesty to induce the Empress Catharine to make the same request of Austria, as Turkey has made of us both."

"I will propose it to the Empress," said the King, eagerly, "and I feel sure that she will agree to do so."

Kaunitz bowed loftily. "Then," replied he, "Austria will mediate; but let it be understood that the peace is to be an honorable one for Turkey, and that Russia ceases any further aggression in that quarter."

"The Porte will be under the necessity of making some concessions," said the King, "since he it is, whose arms have sustained reverses. But Turkey may still remain a second-rate power, for I think that Russia will be satisfied with the Crimea and the Black Sea for herself, and a guarantee of independent sovereigns for Wallachia and Moldavia."

"Independent Princes appointed by Russia!" cried Kaunitz. "My imperial Sovereign will never consent to have a Russian province contiguous to Austria; and should Moldavia and Wallachia be governed by Hospodars and petty despots, their pretended independence would soon melt away into a Russian dependency. Austria, too, would esteem it a great misfortune if Russia should come into possession of the Crimea and the Black Sea. Her dominion over the Black Sea would be more dangerous to Europe than an extension of her territory. Nothing, in short, would be so fatal to that independence, which is dear to all nations, as the cession of this important outlet to Russia."*

"Your Highness may be right," said the King, "and Austria has more to fear from this dominion than Russia; for the Danube is a finger of

*The Prince's own words. Ferrand 1, page 112.

the Black Sea, which might be used to seize some of your fairest provinces. We will keep this in view when we enter upon our negotiations with Russia."

"Before we begin them at all, we must exact of Russia to restore peace to Poland."

"Ah, you wish to draw Poland into the circle of intervention," said Frederic, laughing.

"The Court of Vienna cannot suffer Russia to oppress this unfortunate people as she has hitherto done. Not only has she forced Stanislaus Augustus upon them, but she has also compelled them to alter their constitution, and in the face of all justice, her armies occupy Poland, devastating the country, and oppressing both royalists and republicans."

"You are resolved to speak of Poland," said Frederic, again taking so large a pinch of snuff that it bedaubed not only his face, but his white Austrian uniform. He brushed it off with his fingers, and shaking his head, said,

"I'm not neat enough to wear this elegant dress. I am not worthy of wearing the Austrian ivory."* He then resumed: "You interest yourself in Poland. I thought that Polish independence had been thrown to the winds. I thought, also, that your Highness was of the same opinion on this question as the Empress Catharine, who says that she neither knows where Polish territory begins nor where it ends.—Now I am equally at a loss to know what is and what is not Poland, for in Warsaw a Russian army seems to be perfectly at home, and in the south of Poland an Austrian regiment affirm that they occupy Polish ground by command of the Austrian government.

"Your Majesty is pleased to speak of the country of Zips. Zips has always belonged to Hungary. It was mortgaged by the Emperor Sigismund to his brother-in-law Wladislaw Jagello, for a sum of money.—Hungary has never parted with her right to this country; and, as we have been compelled to send troops to our frontier to watch Russia, the opportunity presents itself for us to demonstrate to Poland that Austria can never consent to regard a mortgaged province as one either given or sold. Zips belongs to Austria, and we will pay back to the King of Poland the sum for which it was mortgaged. That is all."

"Yes, but it will be difficult not only for Poland, but for all Europe, which is accustomed to consider Zips as Polish territory, to remember your Highness's new boundaries. I, for my part, do not understand it, and I will be much obliged to you if, according to your new order of things, you will show me where Hungary ends and Poland begins."

"Where the county of Zips ends, and where the boundaries of Hungary began in olden times, there the line that separates Austria from Poland, should be drawn."

"Ah!" sighed the King, "you speak of the olden time. But with regard to the present we must settle all these things now. I happen, by chance, to have a map of Poland on my table. Oblige me now, by

* The Prince's own word. Ferrand, page 112.

showing me Poland, as your Highness understands its boundaries."

The King stood up, and unfolding a map, laid it on the table. Kaunitz also rose and stood on the opposite side.

"Now," said Frederic, "let me see the county of Zips."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAP OF POLAND.

"HERE, your Majesty, is Zips," said Kaunitz, as he passed his delicate white finger over the lower part of the map.

The King leaned over and looked thoughtfully at the moving finger. For some time he kept silence, then he raised his head and met the gaze of the Prince.

"A very pretty piece of land which Austria takes from her neighbor," said he, with a piercing glance at Kaunitz.

"Austria takes nothing from her neighbor, sire, except that which belongs to her," replied Kaunitz, quietly.

"How very fortunate it is that this particular piece of land should belong to Austria," said the King, with a slight sneer. You see that Poland, who, for so many centuries, had supposed herself to be the rightful owner of the Zips, has, in virtue of such ownership, projected beyond the Carpathian Mountains quite to the interior of Hungary. Now a wedge of that sort is inconvenient, perhaps dangerous, and it is lucky for Austria that she has found out her right of possession in that quarter. It not only contracts her neighbor's domains, but essentially increases her own. It now concerns Austria to prove to Europe her right to this annexation, for Europe is somewhat astonished to hear of it."

"In the Court-chancery, at Vienna, are the documents to prove that the Zips was mortgaged by the Emperor Sigismund to his brother-in-law Wladislaw, in the year 1412, for the sum of thirty-seven thousand groschen.

"Since 1412!" cried Frederic. "Three hundred and eighty-five years' possession on the part of Poland has not invalidated the title of Austria to the Zips! My lawful claim to Silesia was of more modern date than this, and yet Austria would have made it appear that it was superannuated."

"Your Majesty has proved, conclusively, that it was not so," replied Kaunitz, with a slight inclination of the head.

"Will Austria take the course which I pursued to vindicate my right?" asked the King, quickly.

“Stanislaus will not allow us to proceed to extremities,” replied the Prince. “True, he complained at first, and wrote to the Empress-Queen to demand what he called justice.”

—“And will your Highness inform me what the Empress-Queen replied in answer to these demands?”

“She wrote to the King of Poland that the time had arrived when it became incumbent upon her to define the boundaries of her Empire.—That, in her annexation of the Zips to Austria, she was actuated, not by any lust of territorial aggrandizement, but by a conviction of her just and inalienable rights. She was prepared, not only to assert, but to defend them; and she took this opportunity to define the lines of her frontier, for the reason that Poland was in a state of internal warfare, the end of which, no man could foresee.”*

“If I were King of Poland, such plain language as this would put me on my guard.”

“Sire, if you were King of Poland, no foreign power would employ such language towards you,” said Kaunitz, with half a smile.

“That is true,” replied the King, shaking his head. “The King of Poland is a weak, good-natured fellow. He cannot forget that he has been the lover of Catharine of Russia, and, I verily believe, that if she were to make a sign, he would lay, not only himself, but all Poland at her feet.”

“Austria would never suffer her to accept it,” cried Kaunitz.

The King shrugged his shoulders. “And yet it would appear that when Zips lay at her feet, the Empress of Austria was ready to embrace it. But everybody grows eccentric when Poland is in question. My brother Henry, who is in St. Petersburg, was one day discussing this matter of the annexation of Zips, with the Empress. As Catharine, like myself, has never had the privilege of examining the records in the Court of Chancery, at Vienna, she expressed some doubt as to the justice of Austria’s appropriation in that quarter. ‘It seems,’ said she, ‘as if one had nothing to do but stoop down to pick up something in Poland.’† Now when proud Austria and her lofty Kaunitz condescend to stoop and pick up, why shall not other people follow their example? I, too, shall be obliged to march my troops into Poland, for every misfortune seems about to visit this unhappy land. Who knows that in the archives at Berlin, there may not be some document to prove that I, also, have a right to extend the lines of my frontier?”

While Frederic spoke, he kept his eyes fixed upon the face of Prince Kaunitz, as though he would have read to the very bottom of his soul. The latter pretended not to be aware of it; he looked perfectly blank while he affected to be still interested in examining the map.

“It would be fortunate if your Majesty could discover such documents in *your* archives,” replied he, coolly. “I have been told that you

* Ferrand 1, page 94.

† Kuhlbiere’s History of Poland; vol. 4, page 210.

have, heretofore, sought for them in Warsaw; unhappily without being able to find any."

The King could not repress a slight start as he heard this revelation of his own machinations. Kaunitz again affected to see nothing, although he was looking directly in the King's eyes.

"I say," continued Kaunitz, "that it would be most fortunate if, *just at this time*, your Majesty could recover your titles to that portion of Poland which lies contiguous to Russia. Austria, I assure you, will place no difficulties in the way."

"Really," replied the King, "I must say that these lines form a better natural frontier than my present boundaries." Here he passed his hand somewhere through the north-western provinces of Poland, while he continued: "Would my word suffice if I were to say to Austria that the documents, proving my right to this territory, are to be found in the archives at Berlin?"

"Your Majesty's word, as regards this question, is worth more than the documents," said Kaunitz, deliberately.

—"But what would Catharine say? She who looks upon Poland as her own?"

"If she says anything it is high time she were undeceived in that respect," said Kaunitz, hastily. "She must be satisfied to share equally with others. Your Majesty was pleased to relate to me a portion of the conversation between the Empress and Prince Henry. The Empress said, 'It seems as if one had nothing to do but stoop down to pick up something in Poland.' But you forgot the sequel. She added these words: 'If the Court of Vienna begins the dismemberment of Poland, I think that her neighbors have a right to continue it.'"*

"*Vraiment*, your Highness has trusty reporters and your agents serve you admirably!" exclaimed the King.

Kaunitz bowed haughtily.

"We are your Majesty's imitators," replied he. "First during the Silesian war, then at the Court of Dresden, we learned from you the value of secret information.† Having been apprised of the remarkable words of the Empress, I began to fear that she might encroach upon Poland without regard to the claims of Austria. Your Majesty is aware that the Russian army occupy Warsaw, and that a cordon of Russian troops extend as far as the frontiers of Turkey."

"And if I draw my cordon beyond the district of Netz," cried the King, drawing his finger across the map as if it had been a sword, "and Austria extends her frontiers beyond Galicia and the Zips, the Republic of Poland will occupy but a small space on the map of Europe."

—"The smaller the better; the fewer Poles there are in the world the less strife there will be. The cradle of the Poles is that apple of

* La Roche Aymon: Vie du Prince Henri, p. 171.

† Through his Ambassador at Dresden, Frederic had bribed the keeper of the Saxon archives to send him copies of the secret treaties between Austria and Saxony. He did even worse, for the *attaché* of the Austrian embassy at Berlin was in his pay, and he sent the King copies of all the Austrian dispatches.—L. Mühlbach. Life of Frederic the Great.

discord which Eris once threw upon the table of the Gods; they were born of its seeds, and dissention is their native element. As long as there lives a Pole on the earth, that Pole will breed trouble among his neighbors."

"Ah!" said the King, taking a pinch of snuff, "and yet your Highness was indignant at Catharine because she would force the Poles to keep the peace. She appears to *me* to be entirely of one mind with yourself. She, too, looks upon Poland as the apple of Eris and she has found it so over-ripe that it is in danger of falling from the tree. She has stationed her gardener, Stanislaus, to guard it. Let him watch over it. It belongs to him, and if it come to the ground, he has nobody to blame but himself. Meanwhile should it burst, we will find means to prevent it from soiling *us*.—Now let us speak of Turkey. That unlucky Porte must have something done for him, and while we mediate in his behalf, I hope to bring about a good understanding between Austria and Russia. Let us do our best to promote a general peace. Europe is bleeding at every pore; let us bind up her wounds and restore her to health."

"Austria is willing to promote the general welfare," replied Kaunitz, following the King's example and rising from his chair, "but first Russia must conclude an honorable peace with Turkey, and she must abandon her rapacious designs upon the rest of Europe. But should the Empress of Russia compel us to war with her on this question, we will not have recourse to arms until we have found means to alienate from her the most formidable of her allies."

The King laughed. "I approve your policy," said he, "but I am curious to know how you would manage to prevent me from keeping my word. I am certainly pledged to Russia, but I hope that the negotiations into which we are about to enter will end in peace. I shall send a *resumé* of our conference to the Empress, and use every effort to establish friendly relations between you."

"Will your Majesty communicate her reply to me?" asked Kaunitz.

"I certainly will; for I am a soldier, not a diplomatist, and I am so much in love with Truth that I shall be her devotee until the last moment of my life."

"Ah, sire, a man must be a hero like yourself to have the courage to love so dangerous a mistress. Truth is a rose with a thousand thorns. He who plucks it will be wounded, and woe to the head of him who wears it in his crown!"

"You and I have fought and bled too often on the field of diplomacy to be tender about our heads. Let us then wear the crown of truth and bear with its thorns."

So saying, the King reached out his hand and Kaunitz took his leave.

After the Prince had left the room, Frederic remained for a few minutes listening until he heard the door of the farther ante-room closed. "Now, Hertzberg," cried he, "come out—the coast is clear."

A gigantic screen which divided the room in two, began to move, and forth came Count Hertzberg, the King's Prime Minister.

"Did you hear it all?" asked Frederic laughing.

"I did, so please your Majesty."

"Did you write it down so that I can send its *rèsumé* to the Empress Catharine?"

"Yes, your Majesty, as far as it was possible to do so, I have written down every word of your conference," said Hertzberg, with a dissatisfied expression of countenance.

The King raised his large eyes with an enquiring look at the face of his trusty Minister.

"Are you not satisfied, Hertzberg? Why do you shake your head? You have three wrinkles in your forehead, and the corners of your mouth turn down as they always do when something has displeased you. Speak out, man. Of what do you complain?"

"First I complain that your Majesty has allowed the old fox to perceive that you, as well as himself, entertain designs upon Poland, and that in a manner you are willing to guarantee to Austria her theft of the Zips. I also complain that you have consented to induce Russia, through the intervention of Austria, to make peace with Turkey."

"Is that all?" asked the King.

—"Yes, your Majesty, that is all."

—"Well, then, hear my defence. As regards your first complaint, I allowed the old fox (as you call him) to scent my desire for Polish game, because I wished to find out exactly how far I could venture to go in the matter."

—"Yes, sire, and the consequence will be that Austria who has already appropriated the Zips, will stoop down to pick up something else. She has already had her share of the booty, why should she divide with your Majesty?"

"Let Austria have her second share," cried the King, laughing. "It will earn for her a double amount of the world's censure.* As regards your second complaint, let me tell you that at this moment peace is indispensable to us all, and for this reason I desire to bring Russia and Austria into friendly relations with one another. I think it not only wiser but more honorable to pacify Europe than to light the torch of war a second time. It is not an easy matter to secure a general peace, and we must all make some concessions to achieve a result so desirable. Do you suppose that it is as easy to conciliate unfriendly powers as it is to write bad verses? I assure you, Hertzberg, that I would rather sit down to render the whole Jewish history into madrigals than undertake to fuse into unanimity the conflicting interests of three sovereigns, when two out of the three are women. But I will do my best. When your neighbor's house is on fire, help to put it out, or it may communicate and burn down your own."†

* The King's own words. Coxe's History of Austria: vol. 5, page 20.

† The King's own words. Oeuvres Posthumes: vol. 11, page 137.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTESS WIELOPOLSKA.

"You really think that he will come, Matuschka?" asked the Countess Wielopolska of her waiting-woman, who standing behind the chair was fastening a string of pearls in her lady's dusky hair.*

"I know he will come, your ladyship," replied Matuschka.

"And you have seen the Emperor and spoken to him!" exclaimed the Countess, pressing her delicate white hands upon her heart as though she strove to imprison its wild emotions.

—"Indeed I have, my lady."

"Oh, tell me of it again, Matuschka, tell me that I may not fancy it a dream!" cried the Countess eagerly.

—"Well, then, my lady, I took your note to the palace, where the Emperor has given positive orders that every one who wishes it, shall be admitted to his presence. The guard before the door let me pass into the ante-chamber. One of the lords in waiting told me that the Emperor would be there before a quarter of an hour. I had not waited so long when the door opened and a handsome young man in a plain white uniform walked in. I should never have taken him for the Emperor, except that the lord stood up so straight when he saw him. Then I knelt down and gave the letter. The Emperor took it and said, 'Tell your lady that I am not prepared to receive ladies in my palace; but since she wishes to see me, I will go to her. If she will be at home this evening, I will find time to call upon her myself.'

"Ah!" cried the Countess, "he will soon be here. I shall see him—speak to him—pour out to him the longings of my bursting heart! Oh, Matuschka, as the moment approaches I feel as if I could fly away and plunge into the wild waters of the Vistula that bare my husband's corpse, or sink lifeless upon the battle-field that is reddened with the blood of my brothers."

"Do not think of these dreadful things, dear lady," said Matuschka, trying to keep back her tears, "it is twilight and the Emperor will soon be here. Look cheerful—for you are as beautiful as an angel when you smile, and the Emperor will be much more apt to be moved by your smiles than by your tears."

"You are right, Matuschka," cried the Countess, rising hastily from her seat. "I will not weep, for I must try to find favor in the Emperor's eyes."

She crossed the room and stood before a Psyche, where for some time she scrutinized her own features: not with the self-complacency of a

vain woman, but with the critical acuteness of an artist who contemplates a fine picture. Gradually her eyes grew soft and her mouth rippled with a smile. Like a mourning Juno she stood in the long black velvet dress that sharply defined the outlines of her faultless bust, and fell in graceful folds around her stately figure.—Her boddice was clasped by an *agraffe* of richest pearls; and the white throat and the jewel lay together, pearl beside pearl, each rivalling the snowy lustre of the other. Had it not been for those starry eyes that looked out so full of mournful splendor, her face might have seemed too statuesque in its beauty, but from their dark depths all the enthusiasm of a nature that had concentrated its every emotion into one master passion, lit up her face with flashes that came and went like summer-lightening.

"Yes, I am beautiful," whispered she, while a sad smile played around her exquisite mouth. "My beauty is the last weapon left me wherewith to battle for Poland. I must take advantage of it. Life and honor, wealth and blood, everything for my country!"

She turned to her waiting-woman as a queen would have done who was dismissing her subjects.

"Go, Matuschka," said she, "and take some rest. You have been laboring for me all day, and I cannot bear to think that the only friend left me in this world, should be overtaken for me. Sometimes you look at me as my mother once did; and then I dream that I feel her hand laid lovingly upon my head, and hear her dear voice exhorting me to pray that God would bless me with strength to do my duty to my bleeding country."

Matuschka fell upon her knees and kissed the hem of her mistress's robe.

"Do not give way," sobbed she, "do not grieve now."

The Countess did not hear. She had thrown back her head and was gazing absently above. "Oh, yes, I am mindful of my duty," murmured she, "I have not forgotten the vow I made to my mother and sealed upon her dying lips with my last kiss! I have been a faithful daughter of my fatherland. I have given everything—there remains nothing but myself, and oh how gladly would I give my life for Poland!—But God has forsaken us, his eyes are turned away!"

"Accuse not the Lord, dear lady," prayed Matuschka. "Put your trust in Him and take courage."

"It is true. I have no right to accuse my maker," sighed the Countess. "When the last drop of Polish blood is spent and the last Polish heart is crushed beneath the tramp of the enemy's hosts, then it will be time to cry to heaven! Rise, Matuschka, and weep no more—All is not yet lost. Let us hope, and labor that hope may become reality, and Poland may be free!"

She reached her hand to Matuschka and passed into an adjoining room. It was the state apartment of the inn, and was always reserved for distinguished guests. It had been richly furnished, but the teeth of time had nibbled many a rent in the old-fashioned furniture, the faded cur-

tains, and the well-worn carpet. Matuschka, however, had given an air of some elegance to the place. On the carved oak table in the centre stood a vase of flowers, and that her dear mistress might have something to remind her of home, Matuschka had procured a piano, to which the Countess, when weary of her thoughts, might confide the hopes and fears that were surging in her storm-tossed heart.

The piano was open and a sheet of music lay on the desk. As the Countess perceived it, she walked rapidly towards the instrument and sat down before it.

"I will sing," said she. "The Emperor loves music, above all things the music of Gluck."

She turned over the leaves and then said softly.

"Orpheus and Eurydice! LaBernasconi told me that this was his favorite opera. Oh, that I knew which *aria* he loved the best!"

She struck a few chords and in a low voice began to sing. Gradually her beautiful features lost their sadness, she seemed to forget herself and her sorrows, and to yield up her soul to the influence of Gluck's heavenly music. And now with all the power, the melody, the pathos of her matchless voice, she sang, "*Che faro senza Eurydice!*"

The more she sang, the brighter grew her lovely face. Forgetful of all things around, she gave herself wholly up to the inspiration of the hour, and from its fountains of harmony she drew sweetest draughts of consolation and of hope.

The door had opened and she had not heard it. On the threshold stood the Emperor, followed by Matuschka, while the Countess, all unmindful, filled the air with strains so divine that they might have been the marriage hymns of love wedded to Song.

The Emperor had stopped for a moment to listen. His face which at first had worn an expression of smiling flippancy now changed its aspect. He recognised the music and felt his heart beat wildly. With a commanding gesture he motioned Matuschka to withdraw, and noiselessly closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EMPEROR AND THE COUNTESS.

THE Countess continued to sing, although Joseph had advanced as far as the centre of the room. The thickness of the carpet made his foot fall inaudible. He stood with his right hand resting upon the oak-table, while he leaned forward to listen, and one by one the dead memories of

his youthful love came thronging around his heart and filling it with an ecstasy that was half joy and half sorrow.

More and more impassioned grew the music, while the air was tremulous with melody. It softened and softened until it melted away in sobs. The hands of the enchantress fell from the keys, she bowed her head, and leaning against the music, she burst into tears.

The Emperor, too, felt the tear-drops gather in his eyes; he dashed them away, and went rapidly up to the piano.

"Countess," said he in his soft mellow tones, "I felt it no indiscretion to listen unseen to your heavenly music, but no one save God has a right to witness your grief."

She started, and rising quickly, the Emperor saw the face of the lady who had thrown him the wreath.

"It is she!" cried he, the beautiful Confederate!—"I thank you from my heart for the favor you have done me, for I have sought you for some days in vain."

"Your Majesty sought me?" said she, smiling. "Then I am sure that you are ready to sympathise with misfortune."

"Do you need sympathy?" asked he eagerly.

"Sire, I am a daughter of Poland," replied she. "And the Wielopolski's are among the noblest and richest of Poland's noble families."

"Noble! Rich! Our castles have been burned by the Russians, our fields have been laid waste, our vassals have been massacred, and of our kinsmen some have died under the knout, while others drag out a life of martyrdom in Siberia."

"One of the Counts Wielopolski was a favorite of the King was he not?" asked Joseph much moved.

"He was my husband," replied she, bitterly. "Heedless of his countrymen's warnings, he believed in the patriotism of Stanislaus.—When he saw his error, he felt that he merited death, and expiated his fault by self-destruction. His grave is in the Vistula."

"Unhappy wife," exclaimed the Emperor. "And had you no other kinsman?"

"I had a father and three brothers."

"You had them?"

"Yes, sire, but I have them no longer. My brothers died on the field of battle, my father, oh, my father!—God grant that he be no more among the living, *for he is in Siberia!*"

The Emperor raised his hands in horror; then extending them to the Countess, he took hers, and said in a voice of deepest sympathy,

"I thank you for coming to me. Tell me your plans for the future, that I may learn how best I may serve you."

"Sire, I have none," sighed she. "Life is so mournful that I long to close my eyes forever upon its tragedies, but——"

"But what?"

"I should then be robbed of the sight of him who has promised suc-

cor to my fatherland," cried she, passionately, while she sank upon her knees and clasped her hands convulsively together.

Joseph bent over, and would have raised her from the floor. "It ill becomes such beauty to kneel before me," said he, softly.

"Let me kneel, let me kneel!" exclaimed she, while her beautiful eyes suffused with tears. "Here, at your feet, let me implore your protection for Poland! Have mercy, sire, upon the Confederates, whose only crime is their resistance to foreign oppression. Reach out your imperial hand to *them*, and bid them be free, for they must either be slaves or die by their own hands. Emperor of Austria save the children of Sobieski from barbarous Russia!"

"Do not fear," replied Joseph, kindly. "I promised the Confederates that Austria would recognize their envoy, and I will redeem my word. Rise, Countess, I implore you rise, and may the day not be distant when I shall extend my hand to Poland as I now do to you. You have a pledge of my sincerity, in the fact that we have both a common enemy, and it will not be my fault if I do not oppose her, sword in hand. Still, although men call me Emperor, I am the puppet of another will. The crown of Austria is on my mother's head, its shadow, alone, is upon mine. I speak frankly to you; but our acquaintance is peculiar, and, by its nature, has broken down the ordinary barriers of conventional life. Your songs and your tears have spoken directly to my heart, recalling the only happy days that I have ever known on earth. But I am growing sentimental. You will pardon me, I know, for you are a woman, and have known what it is to love."

She slowly shook her head. "No, sire," replied she, "I have never known what it was to love."

The Emperor looked directly in her eyes. *She!* Beautiful and majestic as Hera,—*she*, not know what it was to love! "And your husband," asked he.

"I was married to him as Poland was given to Stanislaus. I never saw him until he became my husband."

"And your heart refused allegiance?"

"Sire, I have never yet seen the man who was destined to reign over my heart."

"Ah, you are proud! I envy him who is destined to conquer and reign over that enchanting domain."

She looked for one moment at the Emperor, and then said, blushing, "Sire, my heart will succumb to him who rescues Poland. With rapture it will acknowledge him as lord and sovereign of my being."

The Emperor made no reply. He gazed with a significant smile at the lovely enthusiast, until she blushed again, and her eyes sought the ground.

"Ah, Countess," said Joseph, after a pause, "if all the women of Poland were of your mind, a multitudinous army would soon flock to her standard."

—"Every Polish woman is of one mind with me. We are all the

daughters of one mother, and our love for her is stronger than death."

The Emperor shook his head. "Were this true," replied he, "Poland would never have fallen as she has done. But far be it from me to heap reproaches upon the unfortunate. I will do what it lies in my power to do for the Poles, provided they are willing to second my efforts for themselves. If they would have peace, however, with other nations, they must show strength and unity of purpose among themselves. Until they can stand before the world in the serried ranks of a national unanimity, they must expect to be assailed by their rapacious neighbors. But let us forget politics, for a moment. I long to speak to you of yourself. What are your plans? How can I serve you?"

"Sire, I have no plans. I ask nothing of the world but a place of refuge, where I can sorrow unseen."

"You are too young, and, pardon me, if I add, too beautiful to fly from the world. Come to Vienna, and learn from me how easy it is to live without happiness."

"Your Majesty will allow me to go to Vienna?" cried the Countess, joyfully. "Ever since I have felt that I could do nothing for Poland, I have longed to live in Vienna, that I might breathe the same atmosphere with your Majesty and the Empress Maria Theresa. You are the only Sovereigns in Europe who have shown any compassion for the misfortunes of my country, and before your generous sympathy my heart bows down in gratitude and admiration."

"Say you so, proud heart that has never bowed before?" exclaimed the Emperor, smiling, and taking the Countess's white hand in his.— "Come, then, to Vienna, not to do homage, but to receive it, for nothing becomes your beauty more than pride. Come to Vienna, and I will see that new friends and new ties awaken your heart to love and happiness."

"I have one relative in Vienna, sire, the Countess Von Salmour."

"Ah! one of the Empress's ladies of honor. Then you will not need my protection there, for the Countess is in high favor with the Empress, and I may say, that she has more influence at Court than I have."

"Sire," said the Countess, raising her large eyes, with an appealing look, "I shall go to Vienna, if I go under your Majesty's protection and with your sanction."

"You shall have both," replied Joseph, warmly. "I will write to my mother to-day, and you shall present my letter. When will you leave? I dare not ask you to tarry here, for this is no place for lovely and unprotected women. Moreover, the King of Prussia has no sympathy with Poland, and he will like you the less for the touching appeal you made in her behalf when you sang at the concert. Greet the Empress for me, and let me hope that you will stir her heart as you have stirred mine. And now farewell. My time has expired: the King of Prussia expects me to supper. I must part from you, but I leave comforted, since I am enabled to say in parting '*Au revoir*.'"

He bowed, and turned to quit the room. But at the door he spoke again.

"If I ever win the right to claim anything of you, will you sing for me the Aria that I found you singing to-night."

"Oh, your Majesty," said the Countess, coming eagerly forward, "you have already earned the right to claim whatsoever you desire of me. I can never speak my gratitude for your condescension; perhaps music will speak for me. How gladly, then, will I sing when you command me."

"I will claim the promise in Vienna," said he, as he left the room.

The Countess remained standing just where he had met her, breathlessly listening to his voice, which for awhile she heard in the ante-room, and then to the last echoes of his retreating steps.

Suddenly the door was opened and Matuschka, with joyful mien, came forward with a purse in her hand.

"Oh! my lady," exclaimed she, "the Emperor has given me this purse to defray our expenses to Vienna."

The Countess started, and her pale face suffused with crimson shame.

"Alms!" said she, bitterly. "He treats me like a beggar."

"No, lady," said Matuschka, abashed. "The Emperor told me that he had begged you to go to Vienna, for business of State, and that he had a right to provide the expenses of our journey there. He said——"

The Countess waved her hand impatiently. "Go back to the Emperor," said she, haughtily. "Tell him that you dare not offer this purse to your lady, for you know that she would rather die than receive alms, even from an Emperor."

Matuschka cast down her eyes, and turned away. But she hesitated and looked timidly at her mistress, whose great, glowing eyes were fixed upon her in unmistakable displeasure.

"My lady," said she, with embarrassment, "I will do your bidding, but you who have been so rich and great, know nothing of the troubles of poverty. Your money is exhausted. I would rather melt my own heart's blood into gold than tell you so, but indeed, dear lady, if you refuse the Emperor's gift you will be without a cent in your purse."

The Countess raised her hands to her hair and unfastened the pearl wreath with which Matuschka had decorated it in anticipation of the Emperor's visit.

"There—take this and sell it. You will readily find a jeweller that understands its value, and if he pays us but the half, it will be twice the sum which you hold in the Emperor's purse."

—"My lady, would you sell your family-jewels! Have you forgotten that your family are pledged not to sell their heir-looms?"

—"God will forgive me if I break my vow. It is more honorable to part with my ancestral jewels than to receive alms. I have no heirs, and no one will be wronged by the act. I have but my mother—Poland. For her I am ready to sacrifice the little I possess, and when nothing else remains, I shall yield my life. Go, Matuschka, go."

Matuschka took the wreath and wept. "I go, lady, sobbed she."—"This will last you for half a year, and then the armlets, then the diadem of brilliants, the bracelets and the necklace, must all go. God grant you may live so long on these family-treasures, that old Matuschka may be spared the humiliation of selling the rest. I have lived too long, since I must chaffer, with a base-born tradesman, for the jewels that were the royal gift of John Sobieski to my lady's noble ancestors."

She raised the Countess's robe to her lips, and left the room. Her mistress looked after her, but her thoughts were wandering elsewhere. Slowly sinking on her knees, she began to pray, and the burthen of her prayer was this :

"Oh! my God, grant that I may win his love."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARIA THERESA.

THE pearls were sold, the Countess had arrived in Vienna, and she was in the presence of the Empress, whom, although they had never met before, she had so long regarded with affectionate admiration.

"I rejoice to see you," said Maria Theresa, graciously extending her hand. "It gives me pleasure to receive a relative of the Countess Von Salmour. But you have another claim upon my sympathy, for you are a Polish woman, and I can never forget that but for John Sobieski, Vienna would have been a prey to the Infidel."

"Upon your Majesty's generous remembrance of Sobieski's alliance, rests the last hope of Poland!" exclaimed the Countess, kneeling and kissing the hand of the Empress. "God has inclined to her redemption the heart of the noblest woman in Europe, and, through her magnanimity, will the wicked Empress of Russia receive her check. Oh, your Majesty, that woman, in the height of her arrogance, believes to-day, that you are only too willing to further her rapacity and participate in her crimes!"

"Never shall it be said that she and I have one thought or one object in common!" cried Maria Theresa, her face glowing with indignation.—"Let her cease her oppression of Poland, or the Austrian eagle will seize the Russian vulture."

The face of the Countess grew radiant with joy. Raising her beautiful arms to heaven, she cried out exultantly, "King of kings, Thou hast heard! Maria Theresa comes to our help! Oh, your Majesty, how many thousand hearts, from this day, will bow down in homage before

your throne! Hereafter, not God, but Maria Theresa will be our refuge!"

"Do not blaspheme," cried the Empress, crossing herself. "I am but the servant of the Lord, and I do His divine will on earth. God is our refuge and our strength, and He will nerve my arm to overcome evil and work out good. I will countenance and uphold the Confederates, because it is my honest conviction that their cause is just, and that they are the only party in Poland who act in honor and good faith."*

"Hitherto, they would have died to vindicate that honor and that faith, now they will live to defend it from their oppressors. Oh, your Majesty, pardon me, if, in my rapture at your goodness, I forget what is due to your exalted station. My heart will burst if I may not give utterance to my joy. I am a lonely creature, with no tie, but that which binds me to my unhappy mother, Polonia!"

"So young, and without home or kindred," said the Empress, kindly. "I have already heard of your misfortunes, poor child, from my son, the Emperor."

At the name of the Emperor, the Countess's pale face was tinged with a faint rosy color. The Empress did not remark it, for she was already thinking what a pity it was that such a surpassing beautiful woman should be a widow; that such an enchanting creature should be unloved and unwedded.

"You are too handsome," said she, "to remain single. Woman was made for love and marriage. Happy is she who can devote her whole heart to the sweet responsibilities of domestic life, and who is not called upon to assume the duties that weigh down the head of royalty.

While the Empress spoke, her eyes were fixed upon the portrait of the Emperor Francis, which still hung between the windows in the place of the mirror, which had been removed from its frame. The Countess Wielopolska had been admitted to the gay sitting-room.

"Earthly grandeur," continued she, "is beset with pains and cares; but the happy wife, whose subjects are her own dear children, is one degree removed from the bliss of angels. You must marry, my dear, and I will find for you a brilliant *partie*."

—"I am poor, your Majesty, and am too proud to enter a rich man's palace without a dowry."

—"You shall have your dowry. I shall instruct my Ambassador at St. Petersburg, to demand the return of your estates. It will be one good deed by which that woman † may expiate some of her many crimes. Your estates once restored you will be an equal match for any nobleman in Europe."

"If I should receive my estates through your Majesty's intercession," replied the Countess, "my home would be an asylum for all the unfortunate Poles. I should think it treason to dream of personal happiness, while Poland lies shackled and bleeding."

* The Empress's own words. See Ferrand 1, page 79.

† The words by which Maria Theresa always designated Catharine.

“But Poland shall be free!” cried the Empress, with enthusiasm. “With the co-operation of France, the voice of Austria will be so loud that Russia will hear, and withdraw her unjust claims. We will strike off the fetters of Poland, while we forge a gentle chain for the Countess Wielopolska. A chain that falls so lightly upon woman, that its burden is sweeter than freedom.”

“Your Majesty must forgive me,” reiterated the Countess, “I have sworn, on my mother’s grave, that as long as I can be useful, I will live for Poland. Should she regain her freedom, I will retire to a convent, where every breath I draw shall be a thanksgiving to God. Should she be doomed to slavery, she will need her sons and daughters no more, and then I will die. Your Majesty sees that I am already betrothed.—I shall soon be the bride of Heaven or the bride of Death.”

“The bride of Heaven,” repeated the Empress, her eyes swimming with tears. “Then be it so: it is not I, who would entice Mary from her Master’s feet. The world is full of Marthas, troubled about many things. Go choose the better part, sweet enthusiast, and I will see that you have cause for thanksgiving.”

She reached her hand to the Countess who kissed it, and withdrew. As she opened the door she felt the bolt turn from the outside.

“His Highness, Prince Kaunitz,” cried a page; and as the Countess was making one last inclination of the head, the tall, slender form of Kaunitz filled the space behind her.

“Have I permission to enter, your Majesty,” said the Minister.

“You are always welcome, Prince,” replied the Empress.

Kaunitz bowed slightly, and as he raised his cold eye to the face of the Countess, a faint smile flitted over his features, but it was followed by a sneer. Without acknowledging her presence by the smallest courtesy, he advanced to the Empress, and the door closed upon Poland forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARIA ANTOINETTE AND COURT ETEQUETTE.

“LETTERS from France, your Majesty,” said Kaunitz, and the face of the Empress grew bright as she recognised the handwriting of her daughter.

“The Dauphiness is well,” said she. “Next to her dear self I love to see her writing. Ah, I have grown very lonely since my little Antoinette has left me! One, by one my children go; one dear face alone,

remains," continued she, pointing to the portrait of the Emperor. Then looking at the letters in the hands of the Prince, she said,

"Have you good news?"

"Yes, your Majesty. The Dauphiness is adored by the French people. They repeat her *bon mots*, write odes and madrigals to her beauty, and hang up her portrait in their houses. When she drives out in her *calèche*, they impede its progress with their welcomes; and when she appears at the theatre, the prima donnas are forgotten. A half a year ago, when she made her entry into Paris and more than a hundred thousand people went out to meet her, the Duke De Brissac said, "Madame you have one hundred thousand lovers, and yet the Dauphin will never be jealous of them."* The dear old Duke! He little knew what literal truth he spoke of the Dauphin on that occasion.

"What do you mean?" asked the Empress, hastily. "I know by the expression of your face that you have something unpleasant to tell."

"I mean to say the Dauphin is not jealous, because he is the only man in France who is not in love with the Dauphiness."

"The Empress turned scarlet. "This is a serious charge which you presume to make against the Dauphin," said she frowning.

"It is ~~un~~ happily true," replied Kaunitz coolly.

"The Dauphiness makes no mention of such a state of things in her letter. It does not breathe a word of complaint."

"Perhaps the Dauphiness, in the innocence of her heart, has no idea of the grounds, which she has for complaint."

The Empress looked displeased. "Do you know that your language is offensive?" said she. "You assert that the Dauphin is insensible to the charms of his beautiful young wife."

"Your Majesty knows well that I will never assert a falsehood. The Dauphin is not in love with his wife, and I do not believe that she has an advocate at the court of Louis XV. Since the shameless partizans of Dubarry have triumphed over the noble Duke of Choiseul, the Dauphiness is without a friend. The Duke d'Arguillon is anti-Austrian, and your Majesty knows what an enemy to Austria was the father of the Dauphin."

"Why do you seek to torture me, Kaunitz?" said the Empress impatiently. "You are not telling me all this for nothing. Say at once what you have to say."

"Your Majesty has not yet read the letter which I had the honor of handing to you just now, I believe," said Kaunitz.

Maria Theresa took up the letter from the *guéredon* on which she had laid it, and began to look it over.

"It is true," sighed she. "The Dauphiness complains of solitude. 'Since the Duke de Choiseul has left,' writes she, 'I am alone and without a friend.' You are right. The Dauphiness is in danger. She writes that her enemies are intriguing to part her from the Dauphin."

* *Memoirs of Madame De Campan*, vol. 1, page 60.

They attempted in Fontainebleau to assign her a suite of apartments remote from those of her husband."

"Yes, the anti-Austrian party, seeing that he is indifferent to her, are doing their best to convert this indifference into dislike. But the Dauphiness saw through the affair, and complained to the King."

"That was right and bold!" cried the Empress joyfully.

"Yes, it was bold, for it gained another enemy for the Dauphiness. She should have spoken to the King through the Duke d'Arguillon, instead of which she applied to his Majesty herself. The Duke will never forgive her; and when the Duchess of Noailles reproved the Dauphiness, she replied that she would never take counsel of etiquette where her family affairs were concerned. The consequence is that the Duchess also has gone over to the enemy."

"To the enemy!" exclaimed the Empress anxiously. "Has she then other enemies?"

—"Madame de Marsan, the governess of the sisters of the Dauphin will never forgive her for having interfered in the education of the young Princesses."

"But surely the daughters of the King will be kind to my poor Marie Antoinette!" exclaimed the Empress, ready to burst into tears. "They promised to love her, and it is but natural and very likely that they should shun the party which upholds the profligate woman who rules the King of France!"

Prince Kaunitz slightly elevated his shoulders. "Madame Adelaide, the eldest, until the marriage of the Dauphin, held the first place at court. Now, the Dauphiness has precedence of her, and the court card-parties are held in her apartments. Madame Adelaide, therefore, has refused to be present, and retires to her own rooms, where she holds rival card-parties which are attended by the anti-Austrians who are opposed to Dubarry. This is the second party who intrigue against the Dauphiness.—Madame Sophie perchance remembers her in her prayers; but she is too pious to be of use to any body.—Madame Victoire, who really loves the Dauphiness, is so sickly that she scarcely ever leaves her room. For a while she held little *réunions* there, which being very pleasant, were for a while attended by the Dauphiness; but Madame de Noailles objected, and court-etiquette required that they should be discontinued."

The Empress had risen and was pacing the floor in great agitation. "So young, so lovely, and slighted by her husband!" murmured she bitterly, while large tear-drops stood in her eyes. "The daughter of the Cesars in strife with a King's base-born mistress and a vile faction who hate her without cause!—And I—her mother—an Empress, am powerless to help her!"

"No, your Majesty," said Kaunitz; "not altogether powerless. You cannot help her with armies, but you can do so with good advice, and no one can advise her as effectually as her mother."

"Advise her! What advice can I give?" cried the Empress angrily.

"Shall I counsel her to attend the *pelets soupers* of the King, and truckle to his mistress? Never! never!—My daughter may be unhappy, but she shall not be dishonored!"

"I should not presume to make any such proposition to the Dauphiness," said Kaunitz quietly. "One cannot condescend to Dubarry as we did to La Pompadour. The latter was at least a woman of mind, the former is nothing more than a vulgar beauty. But there is another lady whose influence at court is without limit; one whom Dubarry contemns, but whom the Dauphiness would do well to conciliate."

"Of what lady do you speak, Kaunitz?"

"I speak of Madame Etiquette, your Majesty. She is a stiff and tiresome old dame, I grant you, but in France she presides over everything. Without her the royal family can neither sleep nor wake; they can neither take a meal if they be in health, nor a purge if they be indisposed without her everlasting *surveillance*. She directs their dress, amusements, associates and behavior; she presides over their pleasure, their weariness, their social hours and their hours of solitude. This may be uncomfortable, but royalty cannot escape it, and it must be endured."

"It is the business of Madame de Noailles to attend to the requisitions of court-etiquette," said the Empress impatiently.

"And of the Dauphiness to attend to her representations," added Kaunitz.

"She will certainly have enough discretion to conform herself to such obligations!"

—"Your Majesty, a girl of fifteen who has a hundred thousand lovers is not apt to be troubled with discretion. The Dauphiness is bored to death by Madame de Noailles' eternal sermons, and therein she may be right. But she turns the Mistress of Ceremonies into ridicule, and therein she is wrong. In an outburst of her vexation the Dauphiness one day called her 'old Madam Etiquette,' and as the *bonmots* of a future Queen are apt to be repeated, Madame de Noailles goes by no other name at court. Again—Not long ago the Dauphiness gave a party of pleasure at Versailles. The company were mounted on donkies."

"On donkies!" cried the Empress, with horror.

"On donkies," repeated Kaunitz, with composure. "The donkey on which the Dauphiness rode was unworthy of the honor conferred upon it. It threw its royal rider."

—"And Antoinette fell off?"

"She fell, your Majesty, and fell without exercising any particular discretion in the matter. The Count of Artois came forward to her assistance, but she waved him off, saying with comic earnestness, 'Do not touch me for your life! Send quick a courier for Madam Etiquette, and wait until she has prescribed the important ceremonies with which a Dauphiness is to be remounted upon the back of her donkey.'" Every one laughed of course, and the next day when the thing was repeated, everybody in Paris was heartily amused—except Madame de Noailles. She did not laugh."

Neither could the Empress vouchsafe a smile, although the affair was ludicrous enough. She was still walking to and fro, her face scarlet with mortification. She stopped directly in front of her unsympathising minister, and said, "You are right. I must warn Antoinette that she is going too far. Oh my heart bleeds when I think of my dear, inexperienced child cast friendless upon the reefs of that dangerous and corrupt Court of France! My God! My God! why did I not heed the warning I received! Why did I consent to let her go!"

"Because your Majesty was too wise to be guided by lunatics and imposters, and because you recognized not only the imperative necessity which placed Maria Antoinette upon the throne of France, but also the value and the blessing of a close alliance with the French."

"God grant it may prove a blessing!" sighed the Empress. "I will write to-day, and implore her to call to aid all her discretion; for Heaven knows it is needed at the Court of France."

"It is not an easy thing to call up discretion whenever discretion is needed," said Kaunitz, thoughtfully. "Has not your Majesty, with that goodness which does so much honor to your heart, gone so far as to promise help to the quarrelsome Poles?"

"Yes," said the Empress, warmly, "and I intend to keep my promise."

"Promises, your Majesty, are sometimes made which it is impossible to keep."

—"But I make no such promises, and therefore honor requires that I fulfil my imperial pledge. Yes, we have promised help and comfort to the patriotic Confederates, the defenders of liberty and of the true faith, and God forbid that we should ever deceive those who trust to us for protection!"

Kaunitz bowed. "Then your Majesty will have the goodness to apprise the Emperor that the army must be put upon a war footing, our magazines must be replenished, and Austria must prepare herself to suffer all the horrors of a long war."

"A war? With whom?" exclaimed the astounded Empress.

"With Russia, Prussia, Sweden, perchance with all Europe. Does your Majesty suppose that the great powers will suffer the establishment of a republic here, under the protection of Austria? A republic upon the body politic of a continent of monarchies, which like a schirrous sore will spread disease that must end in death to all!"

"Of what republic do you speak?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRIUMPH OF DIPLOMACY.

"I SPEAK of Poland," said Kautitz, with his accustomed indifference. "I speak of those insolent Confederates, who, emboldened by the condescension of your Majesty and the Emperor, are ready to dare everything for the propagation of their pernicious political doctrines. They have been pleased to declare Stanislaus deposed and the throne of Poland vacant. This declaration has been committed to writing, and with the signatures of the leading Confederates attached to it, has been actually placed in the King's hands, in his own palace at Warsaw. Not content with this, they have distributed thousands of these documents throughout Poland, so that the question to-day, in that miserable hornet's nest, is not whether the rights of the Confederates are to be guaranteed to them, but whether the Kingdom of Poland shall remain a monarchy or be converted into a republic."

"If this be true, then Poland is lost, and there is no hope for the Confederates," replied the Empress. "I promised them protection against foreign aggression, but with their internal quarrels I will not interfere."

"—It would be a dangerous precedent if Austria should justify those who lay sacrilegious hands upon the crown of their lawful sovereign, and, for my part, my principles forbid me to uphold a band of rebels, who are engaged in an insolent conspiracy to dethrone their King."

"—You are right, Prince, it will never do for us to uphold them. As I have openly declared my sympathy with the Confederates, so I must openly express to them my entire disapprobation of their republican proclivities."

"If your Majesty does that, a war with France will be the consequence of your frankness. France has promised succor to the Confederates, and has already sent Dumouries with troops, arms and gold.—France is longing to have a voice in the differences between Russia and Turkey, and she only awaits co-operation from Austria to declare openly against Russia. She will declare against ourselves, if, after your Majesty's promises, we suddenly change front and take part against the seditious Poles."

"What can we do then to avert war?" cried the Empress, anxiously. "Ah, Prince, you see that the days of my youth and my valor are past! I shudder when I look back upon the blood that has been shed under my reign, and nothing but the direst necessity will ever compel me to be the cause of spilling another drop of Austrian blood.* How then shall we shape our course so as to avoid war?"

* The Empress's own words. F. V. Banner's Contributions to Modern History, vol. 14, page 419

"Our policy," said Kaunitz, "is to do nothing. We must look on and be watchful, while we carefully keep our own counsel. We propitiate France by allowing her to believe in the continuance of our sympathy with the Poles, while we pacify Russia and Prussia by remaining actually neutral."

"But while we temporise and equivocate," cried the Empress, with fervor, "Russia will annihilate the Poles, who if they have gone too far in their thirst for freedom, have valiantly contended for their just rights and are now about to lose them through the evils of disunion. It grieves me to think that we are about to abandon that unhappy nation to the oppression of that woman, who stops at nothing to compass her wicked designs. She, who did not shrink from the murder of her own husband, do you imagine that she will stop short of the annexation of Poland to Russia?"

"We will not suffer her to annex Poland," said Kaunitz, slowly nodding his head. "As long as we are at peace with Russia she will do nothing to provoke our enmity, for France is at our side, and even Prussia would remonstrate if Catharine should be so bold as to appropriate Poland to herself alone."

"You are mistaken. The King of Prussia, who is so covetous of that which belongs to others, will gladly share the booty with Russia."

"Austria could never suffer the co-partnership. If such an emergency should arise, we would have to make up our minds to declare war against them both, or——"

"Or?" asked the Empress, holding her breath, as he paused.

"Or," said Kaunitz, fixing his cold blue eye directly upon her face, "or we would have to share with them."

"Share what?"

"The apple of discord. Anarchy is a three-headed monster; if it is to be destroyed, every head must fall. It is now devouring Poland, and I think that three great powers are strong enough to slay the monster once for all."

"This is all very plausible," said Maria Theresa, shaking her head, "but it is not just. You will never convince me that good can be born of evil. What you propose is neither more nor less than to smite the suppliant that lies helpless at your feet. I will have nothing in common with the Messalina who desecrates her sovereignty by the commission of every unwomanly crime; and as for Frederic, of Prussia, I mistrust him. He has been my enemy for too many years, for me ever to believe that he can be sincerely my friend."

—"France was our enemy for three hundred years, and yet we are allied by more than ordinary ties."

"Our alliance will soon come to naught if we walk in the path to which you would lead us, Prince. France will not be deaf to the misery of Poland. She will hear the death-cry, and come to the rescue."

"No, your Majesty, France will wait to see what we propose to do until it is too late, and she will perceive that a resort to arms will in no

wise affect a *fait accompli*. I, therefore, repeat that the only way to prevent the Polish conflagration from spreading to other nations is for us to preserve a strict neutrality, taking part with neither disputant."

"War must be averted," exclaimed Maria Theresa, warmly. "My first duty is to Austria, and Austria must have peace. To preserve this blessing to my subjects, I will do anything that is consistent with my honor and the dictates of my conscience."

—"Ah, your Majesty, diplomacy has no conscience; it can have but one rule—that of expediency."

—"You concede then that the policy you advocate is not a conscientious one?"

—"No, your Majesty, but it is one which it is imperative for us to follow. Necessity, alone, decides a national course of action. A good statesman cannot be a cosmopolitan. He looks out for himself, and leaves others to do the same. If Poland succumbs it will be because she has not the strength to live; therefore, if her hour be come, let her die. We dare not go to her relief, for before the weal of other nations we must have peace and prosperity for Austria."

"But suppose that France should insist that we define our position?"

—"Then we can do so—in words. It is so easy to hide one's thoughts while we assure our allies of our 'distinguished consideration.'"

"The Empress heaved a deep sigh. "I see," said she, "that clouds are gathering over the political horizon, and that you are resolved to shield your own house, while the tempest devastates the home of your neighbor. Be it so. I *must* have peace; for I have no right to sacrifice my people before the altars of strange gods. This is my first, great obligation, and all other claims must give way to it. *They must give way,*" continued the Empress, slowly communing with herself, "but, oh, it seems cruel! I scarcely dare ask myself what is to be the fate of Poland. Heaven direct us, for all human wisdom has come to naught!" Then turning towards Kaunitz, she held out her hand. "Go, Prince," said she, "and be assured that what we have spoken to each other to-day shall remain sacred between us."

The Prince bowed, and left the room.

The Empress was alone. She went to and fro, while her disturbed countenance betrayed the violent struggle that was raging in her noble, honest heart.

"I know what they want," murmured she. "Joseph thirsts for glory and conquest, and Kaunitz upholds him. They want their share of the booty. And they will overrule my sympathy, and prove to me that I am bound to inaction. Poland will be dismembered, and I will bear my portion of the crime. I shudder at the deed, and yet I cannot raise my hand without shedding my people's blood. I must take counsel of Heaven."

She rang, and commanded the presence of her Confessor. "Perhaps he will throw some light upon this darkness, and the just God will do the rest!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GOSSIPS.

The Countess Wielopolska was alone in her room. She walked to and fro, sometimes stopping before a large pier-glass to survey her own person, sometimes hastening to the window at sound of a carriage passing by, then retiring disappointed as the vehicle went on.

"He comes late," thought she. "Perhaps he has forgotten that he promised to come. Gracious Heaven, what if he should be proof against the blandishments of woman! I fear me he is too cold, and Poland will be lost! And yet his eye, when it rests upon me, speaks the language of love, and his hand trembles when it touches mine. Ah!—And I—when he is by, I sometimes forget the great cause for which I live, and—no, no, no!" exclaimed she, aloud, "it must not, *shall* not be! My heart must know but one love, the love of country. Away with such silly, girlish dreaming! I am ashamed——"

Here the Countess paused to listen again, for this time a carriage stopped before the door, and the little French clock struck the hour.

"He comes," whispered she, scarcely breathing, and she turned her bright smiling face towards the door. It opened and admitted a young woman, whose marvellous beauty was enhanced by all the auxiliaries of a superb toilet and a profusion of magnificent jewels.

"Countess Zamoiska," exclaimed the disappointed hostess, coming forward and striving to keep up the smile.

"And why such a cold reception, my dear Anna?" asked the visitor, with a warm embrace. "Am I not always the same Luschinka, to whom you vowed eternal friendship when we were school-girls together?"

"Yes, we vowed eternal friendship," sighed the Countess Wielopolska, "but since we were happy school-girls, six years have gone by, and so many fearful tragedies have arisen to darken our lives and embitter our young hearts."

"Pshaw," said the lady, casting admiring glances at herself in the mirror, "I do not know why these years should be so sad to you; they have certainly improved your beauty, for I declare to you, Anna, that you were scarcely as pretty when you left school as you are to-day.—Am I altered for the worse? My heart, as you see, has not changed, for as soon as I heard you were in Vienna I flew to embrace you. What a pity your family would mix themselves up in those hateful politics! You might have been the leader of fashion in Warsaw. And your stupid husband, too, to think of his killing himself on the very day of a masked ball, and spoiling the royal quadrille."

"The royal quadrille," echoed the Countess, in an absent tone, "yes, the King, General Repnin, he who put to death so many Polish nobles, and the brutal Branicki, whose pastime it is to set fire to Polish villages, they were to have been the other dancers."

"Yes, and they completed their quadrille, in spite of Count Wielopolski. Bibeskoï offered himself as a substitute, and sat up the whole night to learn the figures. Bibeskoï is a delightful partner."

"A Russian," exclaimed the Countess.

"What signifies a man's nation when he dances well?" laughed the lady.

"*Dis donc ma chère*, are you still mad on the subject of politics?—And do you still sympathise with the poor crazy Confederates?"

"You know, Luschinka, that Count Pac was my father's dearest friend."

"I know it, poor man, he is at the top and bottom of all the trouble. I beseech you *chère Anna*, let us put aside politics, I cannot see what pleasure a woman can find in such tiresome things. *Mon Dieu*, there are so many other things more pleasing as well as more important! For instance: How do people pass their time in Vienna? Have you many lovers? Do you go to many balls?"

"Do you think me so base that I could dance while Poland is in chains?" said the Countess, frowning.

The Countess Zamoiska laughed aloud. "*Voyons*—are you going to play Jeanne d'Arc to bring female heroism into fashion? Oh, Anna! We have never had more delightful balls in Warsaw than have been given since so many Russian regiments have been stationed there."

"You have danced with those who murder your brothers and relatives! Danced while the people of Poland are trodden under foot!"

"*Ah bah! Ne parlez pas du peuple!*" cried the Countess Zamoiski, with a gesture of disgust. "A set of beastly peasants, no better than their own cattle, or a band of genteel robbers, who have made it unsafe to live anywhere on Polish soil, even in Warsaw."

"You are right," sighed the Countess Wielopolska, "let us drop politics and speak of other things."

"—*A la bonne heure*. Let us have a little *chronique scandaleuse*. *Ah ma chère*, I am at home there, for we lead an enchanting life in Warsaw. The King is a handsome man, and, in spite of the Empress Catharine, his heart is still susceptible of the tender passion. You remember his *liaison* with the Countess Kanizka, your sister-in-law?"

"—A base, dishonored woman, who stooped to be the mistress of the man who has betrayed her country."

"—A King, nevertheless, and a very handsome man, and she was inconsolable when he ceased to love her."

"Ah! she was abandoned then, was she?" cried the Countess Wielopolska.

"—Oh no, dear Anna! Your sister-in-law was not guilty of the *bêtise* of playing queen Dido. As she felt quite sure that the King would

leave her soon or late, she anticipated the day, and left him. Was it not excellent? She went off with Prince Repnin."

—"Prince Repnin!" exclaimed the Countess with horror. "The Russian Ambassador!"

—"The same. You should have seen the despair of the King. But he was amiable even in his grief. He tried all sorts of lover's stratagems to win back the Countess: he prowled around her house at night singing like a Troubadour, he wrote her bushels of letters to implore an interview. All in vain. The *liaison* with Repnin was made public, and that, of course ended the affair. The King was inconsolable.* He gave ball after ball, never missed an evening at the theatre, gambled all night, gave sleighing parties, and so on, but it was easy to see that his heart was broken, and had not Tissona, the pretty *cantatrice*, succeeded in comforting him, I really do believe that our handsome King would have killed himself for despair."

"Ah, he is consoled, is he?" said the Countess with curling lips.

"He jests and dances, serenades and gambles, while the gory knout reeks with the noblest blood in Poland, and her noblest sons are staggering along the frozen wastes of Siberia! Oh Stanislaus! Stanislaus! A day of reckoning will come for him who wears the splendor of royalty, yet casts away its obligations!"

"*Vraiment*, dear Anna, to hear your rhapsodies, one would almost believe you to be one of the Confederates who lately attempted the life of the King," cried the Countess Zamoiska, laughing.

"Who attempted the King's life?" said the Countess, turning pale.

—"Why three robbers, Lukawski, Strawinski, and Kosinski."

"I never heard of it," replied the Countess, much agitated. "Tell me what you know of it, if you can Luschinka."

"It is an abominable thing, and long too," said Luschinka, with a shrug. The conspirators were disguised as peasants, and actually had the assurance to come to Warsaw. There were thirty of them, but the three I tell you of were the leaders. The King was on his way to his uncle's palace, which is in the suburbs of Warsaw. They had the insolence to fall upon him in the streets, and his attendants got frightened and run off. Then the conspirators tore the King from his coach and carried him off, swearing that if he uttered one cry they would murder him. Wasn't it awful? Do you think that the dear King didn't have the courage to keep as quiet as a mouse while they took him off with them to the forest of Bielani. Here they robbed him of all he had, leaving him nothing but the ribbon that belonged to the order of the White Eagle. Then they dispersed to give the news of his capture to their accomplices, and Kosinski was left to dispatch him. Did you ever!"

"Further, further," said the Countess, scarcely able to speak, as her old school mate paused in her narrative.

Luschinka laughed. "Doesn't it sound just like a fairy tale, Anna? But it is as true as I live, and happened on the third of November of

* Wrayhall, *Memoirs of the Court of Vienna*, vol 2, page 66

this blessed year 1771. So Kosinski and six others dragged and dragged the King until he lost his shoes and was all torn and scratched, and even wounded. Whenever the others wanted to stop and kill the King, Kosinski objected that the place was not lonely enough. All at once they came upon the Russian patrol. Then the five other murderers ran off leaving the King and Kosinski alone."

"And Kosinski?" asked the Countess with anxiety.

—"Kosinski went on with his sword drawn over the King's head, although he begged him for rest. But the King saw that Kosinski looked undecided and uneasy, so as they came near to the Convent of Bielani, he said to Kosinski, 'I see that you don't know which way to act, so you had better let me go into the Convent to hide, while you make your escape by some other way.' But Kosinski said no, he had sworn to kill him. So they went on further until they came to Mariemont, a Castle belonging to the Elector of Saxony. Here the King begged for rest, and they sat down and began to talk. Then Kosinski told the King that he was not killing him of his own will, but because he had been ordered to do so by others, to punish the King for all his sins, poor fellow! against Poland. The King then said it was not his fault but all the fault of Russia, and at last he softened the murderer's heart. Kosinski threw himself at the King's feet and begged pardon, and promised to save him. So Stanislaus promised to forgive him and it was all arranged between them. They went on to a mill near Mariemont, and begged the miller to let in two travellers who had lost their way. At first the miller took them to be robbers, but after a great deal of begging he let them in. Then the King tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and wrote a note to General Cocceji. The miller's daughter took it to Warsaw, not without much begging on the King's part, and you can conceive the joy of the people when they heard that the King was safe, for everybody seeing his cloak in the streets and his hat and plume on the road naturally supposed that he had been murdered. Well—General Cocceji followed by the whole Court hurried to the mill, and when they arrived there was Kosinski standing before the door with a drawn sword in his hand. He let in the General, and there on the floor, in the miller's shirt, lay the King fast asleep. So Cocceji went down on his knees and kissed his hand and called him his lord and King, and the people of the mill, who had never dreamed who it was, all dropped on their knees and begged for mercy. So the King then forgave everybody, and went back to Warsaw with Cocceji. This my dear is a true history of the attempt that was made by the Confederates on the life of the handsomest man in Poland!"*

"A strange and sad history," said the Countess Anna. "However guilty the King may be, it would still be disgraceful if he were murdered by his own subjects."

—"Oh my love, these Confederates refuse to acknowledge him for

* Wraxall. Memoirs. Vol. 2, p. 76.

their King. Did you not know that they had been so ridiculous as to depose him?"

"What have the Confederates to do with a band of robbers who plundered the King and would have murdered him?" asked Anna indignantly. "Are they to be made answerable for the crimes of a horde of banditti?"

"*Ma chère*, the banditti were the tools of the Confederates. They have been taken and everything has been discovered. Pulawski, their great hero, hired the assassins and bound them by an oath. Letters found upon Lukawski, who boasts of his share in the villany, show that Pulawski was the head conspirator, and that the plot had been approved by Zarembo and Pac!"

"Then all is lost," murmured Anna. "If the Confederates have sullied the honor of Poland by consenting to crime as a means to work out her independence, Poland will never regain her freedom. Oh that I should have lived to see this day!"

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

"*Vraiment*, Anna," said the Countess Zamoiska pettishly, "I cannot understand you. Instead of rejoicing over the King's escape, here you begin to cry over the sins of his murderers. All Poland is exasperated against them, and nothing can save them.* So dear Anna dry your eyes they will be as red as a cardinal's hat. Goodness me, if I hadn't wonderful strength of mind, I might have cried myself into a fright long ago, for you have no idea of the sufferings I have lived through. You talk of Poland, and never ask a word about myself. It shows how little interest you feel in me that you still call me by the name of my first husband."

"Are you married a second time?" asked Anna, raising her head.

"—*Ah ma chère*, my name has not been Zamoiska for four years. Dear me! The King knows what misery it is to be tied to a person that loves you no longer, and luckily for us, he has the power of divorce. He does it for the asking, and every divorce is a signal for a succession of brilliant balls; for you understand that people don't part to go off and pout. They re-marry at once, and of course, everybody gives balls, routs and dinners in honor of the weddings."

"Have you married again in this way?" asked the Countess gravely.

"Oh, yes," replied the unconscious Luschinka, "I have been twice married and twice divorced. But it was not my fault. I loved my first husband with a depth of passion which he could not appreciate, and I was in an agony of despair, when six months after our marriage he told me that he loved me no longer and was dying for the Countess Luwiendo. She was my bosom friend, so you can imagine my grief; *mais j'ai su faire bonne mine à mauvais jeux*. I invited the Countess to my villa, and there under the shade of the old trees in the park, we walked arm in

*Lukawski and Strawinski were executed. They died cursing Kosinski as a traitor. Wraxall. Vol. 2: p. 88.

arm and arranged with my husband all the conditions of the separation. Every one praised my generous conduct; the men in particular were in raptures, and Prince Lubomirski on the strength of it, fell so desperately in love with me that he divorced his wife and offered me his hand."

"You did not accept it!" exclaimed Countess Anna.

"What a question!" said the ex-countess pouting. "The Prince was young, rich, charming, and a great favorite with the King. We loved one another, and of course, were married. But, indeed, my dear, love does seem to have such butterfly wings that you scarcely catch it before it is gone!—My second husband broke my heart exactly as my first had done; he asked me to leave him, and of course I had to go. Men are abominable beings, Anna: scarcely were we divorced before he married a third wife."*

"Poland is lost—lost—," murmured the Countess Anna. "She is falling under the weight of her children's crimes. Lost!—Oh Poland. My unhappy country!"

—" *Au contraire ma chère*. Warsaw was never gayer than it is at present. Did I not tell you that every divorce was followed by a marriage, and that the King was delighted with the masquerades and balls and all that sort of thing? Why nothing is heard in Warsaw at night but laughter, music, and the chink of glasses."

"And nevertheless you could tear yourself away?" said the Countess ironically.

"I had to go," sighed the Princess. "I am on my way to Italy. You see, *ma chère*, it would have been *inconvenant* and might have made me ridiculous to go out in society, meeting my husbands with their two wives, and I—abandoned by both these faithless men. I should have been obliged to marry a third time but my heart revolted against it."

—"Then you travel alone to Italy?"

By no means, *mon amour*, I am travelling with the most bewitching creature!—my lover. Oh, Anna, he is the handsomest man I ever laid my eyes upon; the most delightful, and he paints so divinely that the Empress Catharine has appointed him her court painter. I love him beyond all expression; I adore him!—You need not smile, Anna, *que voulez-vous? Le coeur toujours vierge pour un second amour*.

"If you love him so dearly, why then does your heart revolt against a marriage with him?" asked the Countess Anna.

"I told you he was a painter, and not a nobleman," answered the ex-Princess, impatiently. "One loves an Artist, but cannot marry him. Do you suppose I would be so ridiculous as to give up my title to be the respectable wife of a painter? The Princess Lubomirska a Madam Wand, simple Wand! Oh, no! I shall travel with him, but I will not marry him."

"Then go!" exclaimed the Countess Anna, rising, and casting looks of scorn upon the Princess. "Degenerate daughter of a degenerate fatherland, go, and drag our shame with you to Italy. Go, and enjoy

your sinful lusts while Poland breathes her last, and vultures prey upon her dishonored corpse. But take with you the contempt of every Polish heart, that beats with love for the land that gave you birth!"

She turned, and without a word of farewell, proudly left the room.— The Princess raised her brow and opened her pretty mouth in bewilderment, then rising, and going up to the mirror, she smoothed her hair and began to laugh.

"What a pathetic fool!" said she. "Anybody might know that her mother had been an actress. To think of the daughter of an Artist getting up a scene because a Princess will not stoop to marry a painter! *Quelle bêtise.*"

With these words she walked back to her carriage and drove off.

CHAPTER XXV

AN EXPLANATION.

THE Countess Anna, meanwhile, had retired to her room. Exhausted by her own emotions, she sank into a chair, and clasping her hands convulsively, she stared, with distended eyes, upon the blank wall opposite.

She was perfectly unconscious that, after a time, the door had opened and Matuschka stood before her. It was not until the old woman had taken her hand and raised it to her lips, that she started from her mournful reverie.

"What now, Matuschka?" said she, awakening from her dream.

"My lady, I come to know what we are to do. The pearl necklace and wreath are sold, and they have maintained the Countess Wielopolska as beseems her rank, but we live upon our capital, and it lessens every day. Oh, my lady, why will you conceal your poverty when the Emperor——"

"Peace!" interrupted the Countess. "When we speak of our poverty don't name the Emperor. If there is no more money in our purse, take the diadem of brilliants, sell the diamonds and replace them with false stones. They will bring a thousand ducats, and that sum will last us for a whole year."

"And then?" sobbed Matuschka.

"And then," echoed the Countess, thoughtfully. "Then we will either be happy or ready for death. Go, Matuschka, let no one know that I am selling my diamonds; but replace them by to-morrow morning; for I must wear them at the Emperor's reception."

"Your whole set, pearls and diamonds are now false," said the per-

severing servant. "What will the Emperor say when he hears of it?"

—"He must never know of it. Now go, and return quickly."

Matuschka, looking almost angrily at her lady, left the room. In the ante-room stood a man, wrapped in a cloak. She went quickly up to him with the open *étui*.

"The diamond coronet," whispered she. "I am to sell the jewels and have their places filled with false ones. It is to be done before to-morrow."

—"How much does she expect for it?" asked the visitor in a low voice.

—"A thousand ducats, sire."

—"I will send the sum to-night. Hide the coronet until to-morrow, and then return it to her. Where is she?"

—"In her cabinet, your Majesty."

—"Let no one enter until I return."

He then threw down his cloak, and without knocking, opened the door. The Countess was still lost in thought. She still gazed at the blank wall, and heard the flippant voice which had poured out its profanity as though life had been a jest, and immortality a dream.

The Emperor stopped to contemplate for a moment, and his large, loving eyes rested fondly noble form.

"Countess Anna," said he, softly.

"The Emperor!" exclaimed she, rising and coming joyfully forward, while a deep blush overspread her face.

—"What? Will you not respect my incognito? Will you not receive me as Count Falkenstein?"

"Is not the name of the Emperor the first that is pronounced by the priest when he prays before the altar for his fellow-creatures?" replied she, with an enchanting smile. "Think of my heart as a priest, and let that name be ever the first. I speak in my prayers to heaven."

"By heaven, if priests resembled you, I should not hate them as I do. Come, my lovely priestess, then call me Emperor if you will, but receive me as Count Falkenstein."

"Welcome Count," replied she cheerfully.

"God be praised then, my royalty has disappeared for awhile," said Joseph.

—"And yet my lord and Emperor, it is the privilege of royalty to heal all wounds, to wipe away all tears, and to comfort all sorrow.—What a magnificent prerogative it is to hold in one's own hand the happiness of thousands."

"What is happiness, sweet moralist?" cried Joseph. "Mankind are forever in search of it, yet no man has ever found it."

"What is happiness!" exclaimed she, with enthusiasm. "It is to have the power of ruling destiny—it is to stand upon the Himmaleyah of your might, when stretching forth your imperial hand, you can say to the oppressed among nations, 'come unto me, ye who strive against tyranny, and I will give you freedom.'"

"In other words, replied the Emperor," with an arch smile, "it is to march to Poland and give battle to the Empress of Russia."

"It is, it is!" cried she, with the fervor of a Miriam. "It is to be the Messiah of crucified Freedom, to redeem your fellows from bondage, and to earn the blessings of a people to whom your name, for all time, will stand as the type of all that is great in a sovereign and good in a man! Oh, Emperor of Austria, be the generous redeemer of my country!"

And scarce knowing what she said, she took his hand and pressed it to her heart.

Joseph withdrew it, gently, saying, "peace, lovely enthusiast, peace! Give politics to the winds! She is an abominable old hag, and the very rustling of her Sybilline leaves, as she turns them over in the Cabinet of the Empress, makes me shudder with disgust. Let us drive her hence then. I came hither to taste a few draughts of happiness at *your* side, sweet Anna."

The Countess sighed wearily, as the Emperor drew her to his side, and her pale, inspired face was turned upon him with a look of unutterable anguish.

The Emperor saw it and leaned his head back upon the cushion of the sofa. After a pause he said, "How sweet it is to be here!"

"And yet you came late," whispered she, reproachfully.

"Because I travelled by a circuitous route, got into one hackney coach and out of another, drove hither, thither, and everywhere, to baffle my mother's spies. Do you suppose that any one of her bigoted followers would believe in a chaste friendship like ours? Do you suppose they would understand the blameless longings I have to see your lovely face, and to listen to the melody of your matchless voice? Tell me Countess Anna, how have I deserved the rich boon of your friendship?"

"Nay, Count Falkenstein," replied she, with a bewitching smile, "tell me how I have earned yours. Moreover, who tells you that I am disinterested in my sentiments? The day may come when you will understand how entirely I rely upon you for assistance."

"But you have not given your friendship exclusively for the sake of the day that may come? Have you?" said the Emperor, with a piercing glance at her beautiful pale face.

The Countess cast down her eyes and blushed. "Do you mistrust me?" asked she, in a low, trembling voice.

"Give me a proof of your confidence in me," said Joseph, rising and taking both her hands in his. "You call me friend—give me then the right of a friend. Let me, in some degree, replace to you the fortune of which the Russian Empress has robbed you."

"You are mistaken, sire," said the Countess, proudly; "the Russian Empress did not rob me of everything. She took my lands, but I have invested funds in foreign securities which yield me an ample income. I have also, my family jewels; and as long as you see me wearing them, you may feel sure that I have other means of support."

The Emperor shook his head. "You are not wearing your family jewels, Anna," said he.

"How sire!" exclaimed she, blushing.

He leaned over, and in a low voice said, "your jewels are false, your pearls are imitation, and there is not a single diamond in that coronet you intend to wear at my mother's reception to-morrow."

The cheeks of the Countess grew scarlet with confusion, and her head drooped with shame. The Emperor laid his hand upon her arm. "Now Anna," said he, tenderly, "now that I know all, grant me the happiness of relieving you from your temporary embarrassments. Gracious heaven! You who are not ashamed to confide your distress to pawn brokers and jewellers, you refuse to trust *me!*"

"I would rather be under obligations to a stranger than to a friend," returned the Countess, in a voice scarcely audible.

"But Anna," cried the Emperor, with a sudden burst of feeling, "you would rather be obliged to the man whom you loved than to a stranger. Oh, if you but loved me, there would be no question of 'mine or thine' between us! It is said—I have betrayed myself, and I need stifle my passion no longer, for I love you, beautiful Anna, I love you from my soul, and, at your feet, I implore you to give me that which is above all wealth or titles. Give me your love, be mine. Answer me, answer me. Do you love me?"

"I do," whispered she, without raising her head.

The Emperor threw his arm around her waist. "Then," said he, "from this hour you give me the right to provide for you. Do you not?"

—"No sire, I can provide for myself."

"Then," cried Joseph, angrily, "you do not love me."

"Yes, sire, I love you. You predicted that my heart would find its master. It has bowed before you and owns your sway. In the name of that love, I crave help for Poland. She cries to heaven for vengeance and heaven has not heard the cry. She is threatened by Russia and Prussia, and if noble Austria abandon her, she is lost! Oh, generous Austria, rescue my native land from her foes!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Emperor, sarcastically, "you call me Austria, and your love is bestowed upon my station and my armies! It is not I whom you love, but that Emperor of Austria, in whose hand lies the power that may rescue Poland."

"I love *you*; but my love is grafted upon the hope I so long have cherished that in you I recognise the saviour of my country."

"Indeed!" cried the Emperor, with a sneer.

The Countess did not hear him, she continued, "until I loved you, every throb of my heart belonged to Poland. She, alone, was the object of my love and of my prayers. But since then, sire, the holy fire that burned upon the altar is quenched. I am faithless to my vestal vow, and I feel within my soul the tempest of an earthly passion. I have broken the oath that I made to my dying mother, for there is one more dear to me

than Poland now, and for him are the prayers, the hopes, the longings; and the dreams that all belonged to Poland! Oh, my lord and my lover, reconcile me to my conscience! Let me believe that my loves are one; and on the day when your victorious eagles shall have driven away the vultures that prey upon my fatherland, I will throw myself at your feet, and live for *your* love alone."

"Ah, indeed," said the Emperor, with a sardonic laugh, "you will go to such extremity in your patriotism. You will sell yourself that Poland may be redeemed through your dishonor. I congratulate you upon your dexterous statesmanship. You sought me, I perceive, that by the magic of your intoxicating beauty, you might lure me to sacrifice the lives of *my* people in behalf of *yours*. Your love is a stratagem of diplomacy, nothing more."

"Oh, sire," cried she, in tones of anguish, "you despise me then?"

—"Not at all; I admire your policy, but unhappily it is only partially successful. You had calculated that I would not be proof against your beauty, your talents, your fascinations. You are right; I am taken in the snare, for I love you madly."

"And do I not return your love from my heart?" asked she.

"Stay," cried Joseph, "hear me out. One half your policy I say was successful; the other has been at fault. As your lover I will do anything that man can do to make you happy; but my head belongs to my fatherland, and you cannot rule it, through my heart."

—"Sire, I seek nothing that is inconsistent with Austria's welfare. I ask help for Poland."

—"Which help might involve Austria in a ruinous war with two powerful nations, and leave her so exhausted that she would have to stand by and witness the partition of Poland without daring to claim a share for herself?"

"The partition of Poland!" exclaimed the Countess, with a cry of horror. Avenging God, wilt Thou suffer such culminations of human wickedness! And you, sire, could you share in such a crime? But, no! no! no!—see how misfortune has maddened me, when I doubt the honor of the noble Emperor of Austria. Never would the lofty and generous Joseph stoop to such infamy as this!"

—"If Poland must succumb, I will act as becomes my station and responsibilities as the sovereign of a great empire, and I will do that which the wisdom and prudence of my mother shall dictate to her son. But Anna, dear Anna," continued he, passionately, "why should the sweet confession of our love be lost in the turbid roar of these political waters? Tell me that you love me as a woman ought to love, having no God, no faith, no country, but her lover; losing her identity and living for his happiness alone!"

"I love you, I love you," murmured she, with indescribable tenderness, and clasping her hands, she fell upon her knees, and raised her eyes to him with a look that made him long to fold her to his heart, and yield up his empire, had she requested it at his hands. "Help for Po-

land!" prayed she again, "help for Poland and I am yours forever!"

Joseph grew angry with himself and with her. "Love does not chaffer," said he, rudely. "When a woman loves, she must recognise her master, and bow before his will; otherwise there is no love. For the last time I ask, do you love me?"

"More than life or honor."

"Then be a woman, and yield yourself to me. Away with nationality, it is an abstraction. What are Poland and the world to you?—Here upon my heart are your country and your altars! Come, without condition and without reserve! I cannot promise to free Poland, but by the bright heaven above us, I swear to make you happy!"

She shook her head mournfully and rose from her knees. "Make me happy!" echoed she. "For me there can be no happiness while Poland sorrows."

"Say that again," thundered the Emperor, "and we part forever."

"I say it again," said she, with proud tranquility, but pale as death.

"And yet if I am not ready to sacrifice my own people for yours, you will not believe in *my* love! You are unwilling to give up an idle dream of Polish freedom, and you ask of me, a man and an Emperor, that I shall bring to you the offering of my own honor and of my people's happiness."

She said nothing.

"It is enough," cried Joseph, his eyes flashing with anger. "Pride against pride! We part; for the first thing I require of a woman who loves me, is submission. It grieves me bitterly to find you so unwomanly. I would have prized your love above every earthly blessing, had you given it freely. Conditionally, I will not accept it; above all when its conditions relate to the government of my empire. No woman shall ever have a voice in *my* affairs of State. If for that reason she reject me, I must submit, although, as at this moment, my heart bleeds at her rejection."

"And mine! *My* heart!" exclaimed the Countess, raising her tearful eyes to his.

"Pride will cure you," replied he, with a bitter smile. "Go back to the fatherland that you love so well, and I shall imitate you, and turn to mine for comfort. There is many a mourning heart in Austria less haughty than yours, to which, perchance, I may be able to bring joy or consolation. God grant me some compensation in life for the supreme misery of this hour! Farewell Countess Wielopolska. To-night I leave Vienna."

He crossed the room, while she looked after him as though her lips were parting to utter a cry. At the door he turned once more to say farewell. Still she spoke not a word, but looked as though, like Niobe, she were stiffening into marble.

The Emperor opened the door and passed into the ante-room. As he disappeared, she uttered a low cry, and clasped both her hands over her heart.

"My God, my God, I love him!" sobbed she, and reeling backward, she fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAMINE IN BOHEMIA.

THE cry of distress from Bohemia reached Vienna, and came to the knowledge of the Emperor. Joseph hastened to bring succor and comfort to his unhappy subjects.

Their need was great. Two successive years of short harvest had spread want and tribulation throughout all Germany, especially in Bohemia and Moravia, where a terrible inundation, added to the failure of the crops, had destroyed the fruits and vegetables of every field and every little garden.

The country was one vast desert. From every cottage went forth the wail of hunger. The stalls were empty of cattle, the barns of corn; the plows lay idle on the ground, for there was neither grain to sow, nor oxen to drive; there were neither men nor women to till the soil, for there was no money to pay nor food to sustain them. Each man was alone in his want, and each sufferer in the egotism of a misery that stifled all humanity, complained that no one fed him, when all were fainting for lack of food.

Bread! Bread! The dreadful cry arose from hundreds of emaciated beings, old and young, who in the crowded cities lay dying in the streets, their wasted hands raised in vain supplication to the passers by!

Bread! Bread! moaned the peasant in his hut, and the villager at the wayside, as with glaring eyes they stared at the traveller, who more fortunate than they, was leaving Bohemia for happier climes, and surely in gratitude for his own rescue, would throw a crust to the starving fellows whom he left behind!

There they lay, watching for the elegant carriages, the horsemen, the wagons that were accustomed to pass them on their road to Prague. But now the high-road was empty, for the famine had extended to Prague, and no one cared to go thither.

And yet on either side of the road were hundreds of starving wretches, who long ago had left their miserable huts and now lay in heaps upon the ground, the heavens their only shelter, the wide world their home. These were the inhabitants of the mountains, who had come down to the neighboring villages for help, but had been rudely driven away by those whose sufferings had maddened them and turned their hearts to stone.

They had lain there for a day, and yet not one trace of a traveller had they seen. The mid-day sun had blistered their foreheads but they had not felt it, for the fiery pangs of hunger were keener than the sun; and now the evening air that fanned their burning brows brought no relief, for fiercer and more cruel grew the gnawings of the fiend within.

"There is no help on earth," cried an old woman, the grandmother of a whole generation of stalwart mountaineers, who lay stricken around her. There were her son and his wife, once such a stately pair, now reduced to two pale spectres; there were troops of grandchildren, once round-cheeked as the carved angels on the altar of the village-chapel, now hollow-eyed and skinny, with their blanched faces upturned imploringly to the parents who were scarcely conscious of their presence there. Hunger had extinguished youth, strength, beauty, and had almost uprooted love. Not only had it destroyed their bodies, but it had even corrupted their souls.

"There is no help on earth," cried the old woman again with such energy of despair that her voice found its way to the dull ear of every starving wretch around. And now from every hollow voice came back the mournful chorus, "There is no help on earth!"

"There is no help in heaven!" shrieked an old man, who with his family was lying in a hollow, whence their moans were heard as though coming from the grave. "There is no God in heaven, else he would hear our cries! There is no God!"

"There is no God!" echoed the maddened wretches, and many a wasted arm was raised in defiance to heaven.

"Still, still, my friends!" cried the grandmother, "let us not sin because we starve. We can but die and the Lord will receive us." And as she spoke she raised her trembling body and stretched forth her poor withered arms as though she would have calmed the tempest she had raised.

"Still, father Martin!" cried she, in a voice of authority. "There is a God above, but He has turned away His face because of our sins. Let us pray to see the light of His countenance. Come friends, let us gather up all our strength and pray." She rose and knelt, while inspired by her example, the multitude knelt also. Old and young, men and women, all with one supreme effort lifted up their hands to heaven.

But the prayer was over, the petitioners fell prostrate to the earth, and still no sign of help from above!

"You see, mother Elizabeth," groaned father Martin, "your prayers are all vain. Heaven is empty, and we must die."

"We must die, we must die!" howled the famishing multitude, and exhausted by the might of their own despair, they fell to rise no more. A long, fearful silence ensued. Here and there a faint moan struggled for utterance, and a defiant arm was raised as though to threaten Omnipotence; then the poor, puny creatures whom hunger had bereft of reason, shivered, dropped their hands, and again lay still.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the faint sound of carriage-wheels.

Nearer and more near it came, until the horses' heads were to be seen through the clouds of dust that enveloped the vehicle. The poor starving peasants heard, but scarcely heeded it. They stared in mute despair, or murmured, "It is too late!"

Still the carriage rolled on, the dust grew thicker, and now it hid from the travellers' view the miserable wretches that lay dying around them. But heaven be praised, they stop!

There were two carriages followed by outsiders. The first carriage contained three persons all clad in dark, plain, civilian's clothes; but it was easy to recognise in the youngest of the three, the most important personage of all. It was he who had given the order to halt, and now without waiting for assistance, he leaped from the carriage and walked at once to the foremost group of sufferers. He bent down to the old woman, who, turning her fever-stricken face to him, moaned feebly.

"What is the matter?" said the traveller in a gentle and sympathising tone. "How can I help you?"

The old mother made a violent effort and spoke. "Hunger," said she, "I burn—burn—hunger."

"Hunger! hunger!" echoed the people around, shaking off their lethargy, and awakening once more to hope.

"Oh, my God! This woman will die before we can succor her," exclaimed the young man sorrowfully. "Hasten, Lacy, and bring me some wine."

"We have none," replied Lacy, "your Majesty gave away your last bottle in the village behind."

"But she will die!" exclaimed the Emperor, as bending over the poor old woman, he took her skinny hand in his.

"We must die," murmured she, while her parched tongue protruded from her mouth.

"Sire, you are in danger," whispered Lacy.

"Rise, your Majesty," interrupted Rosenburg, "these unhappy people have the typhus that accompanies starvation, and it is contagious."

"Contagious for those who hunger, but not for us," replied Joseph. "Oh, my friends," continued he, "see here are three generations all dying for want of food. Gracious heaven! They have lost all resemblance to humanity. Hunger has likened them to animals. Oh, it is dreadful to think that a crust of bread or a sip of wine might awaken these suffering creatures to reason; but flour and grain can be of no avail here!"

"They may avail elsewhere, sire," said Rosenburg, "and if we can do nothing for these, let us go on and help others."

"It is fearful," said the Emperor, "but I will not leave until I have made an effort to save them."

He signed to one of his outriders, and taking out a leaf of his pocket-book, wrote something upon it. "Gallop for your life to Prague," said he, "and give this paper to the lord steward of the palace. He must at once send a wagon hither, laden with food and wine, and that he may be

able to do it without delay, tell him to take the stores from the palace and all the viands that are preparing in the kitchen for my reception.— This paper will be your warrant. As soon as you shall have delivered your message, fill a portmanteau with old Hungarian wine and gallop back to me. Be here within two hours, if you kill two of my best horses to compass the distance.”

The outrider took the paper, and setting spurs to his horse, he galloped off to Prague.

“And now, my friends,” continued the Emperor, “although we have no wine, we have bread and meat. Not much, it is true, but I think it will save these people from death.”

The Emperor hastened in the direction of his carriage. “Quick, Günther, hand me the camp-chest.”

“But your Majesty has not eaten a morsel to-day,” urged Rosenberg, following him. “I cannot consent to see the food prepared for you, bestowed upon any one. You will lose your health if you fast for such a length of time. You owe it to your mother, the Empress, and to your subjects, not to deprive yourself of food.”

“Do you think I could eat in presence of such hunger!” cried the Emperor, impatiently. “Come, Günther, come all of you, and help me. Here is a large fowl. Cut it into little morsels, and—oh, what a discovery!—a jar of beef jelly. While you carve the fowl I will distribute the jelly. Come, Lacy and Rosenberg, take each a portion of this chicken, and cut it up.”

“Good heavens, Lacy, come to my relief,” cried Rosenberg. “The Emperor is about to give away his last morsel. We both have had breakfast, but he has not tasted food for a day.”

“He is right, our noble Emperor,” replied Lacy. “In the presence of such suffering, he is right to forget himself; if he could not do so, he would not be worthy to be a sovereign.”

The Emperor heard none of this, he was already with the sufferers, distributing his food. With an earnest look and a firm and rapid hand, he put a teaspoonful of jelly between the parched, half opened lips of the grand-mother, while Günther, imitating him, did the same for her son.

For a moment the Emperor looked to see the effect of his remedy. He saw an expression of joy flit over the features of the poor old woman, and then her lips moved, and she swallowed the jelly.

“See, see!” cried the Emperor, overjoyed, “she takes it. Oh, Günther, this will save them until help comes from Prague! But there are so many of them. Do you think we have a hundred teaspoons of jelly in the jar?”

And he looked anxiously at Günther.

“It is a large jar, your Majesty,” said Günther, “and I think it will hold out.”

“Be sparing of it at any rate, and do not heap up your spoons. And now, not another word. We must go to work.”

He stooped down and spoke no more, but his face was lit up by the fire of the christian charity that was consuming his noble heart. He looked as must have looked his ancestor Rudolph of Hapsburg, who once meeting a foot-sore priest bearing the *viaticum* to a dying parishioner, gave up his horse to the servant of God, and continued his way on foot.

While the Emperor flew from group to group, resuscitating his expiring subjects, Lacy and Rosenberg were carefully cutting up the fowl that had been roasted for his dinner. A deep silence reigned around, all nature seemed to be at peace, and over the reclining sufferers the evening sun threw long rays of rosy light, that illumined their pallid faces with the hue of hope and returning life.

Gradually there was motion in the scene. Here and there a head arose from the ground, then a body, and presently a gleam of intelligence shot athwart those glaring, blood-shot eyes. The Emperor watched them with a happy smile. His errand of mercy was at an end. The jar was empty, but every one had received a share, and all were reviving.

"Now give them a morsel of chicken," said Joseph. "A small piece will suffice, for after their long fast they can only eat sparingly of food; and they will have had enough until help comes to us from Prague."

"Then," said Rosenberg, affectionately, "I hope that your Majesty, too, will take something. There will certainly be enough left for you to eat your dinner without remorse."

"Never mind me, Rosenberg," laughed the Emperor. "I shall not die of starvation, I promise you. When the creature cries out for nourishment, I shall give it; but I think that my Maker will not love me the less for having, voluntarily, felt the pangs of hunger for once in my life. I can never forget this day in Bohemia; it has confirmed my resolution to reign for the good of my people alone, and as God hears me, they shall be happy when I govern them.—But your chicken is ready. To satisfy you, I will go and beg my supper in yonder village, and, as there are enough of you to attend to these poor sufferers, I will take Lacy to keep me company. Come Lacy."

He took the arm of the Fieldmarshal, and they both presently disappeared behind the trees.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BLACK BROTH.

In a quarter of an hour they had reached the village. The same absence of all life struck painfully upon the Emperor's heart as they walked along the deserted streets, and heard nothing save the echo of

their own footsteps. Not the lowing of a cow nor the bleating of a sheep, not one familiar rural sound broke the mournful stillness that brooded over the air. Occasionally a ghastly figure, in tattered garments, from whose vacant eyes the light of reason seemed to have fled, was seen crouching at the door of a hut, wherein his wife and children were starving. This was the only token of life that greeted the eyes of the grave and silent pair.

"Lacy," at last sighed the Emperor, "how fearful is this deadly silence. One might fancy that he walked in Pompeii, and Pompeii, alas, is not more lonely. To think that I, an Emperor, must look on and give no help!"

"Oh, yes, sire, you can give help," said Lacy, encouragingly. "There must be some means by which this fearful famine can be arrested."

"I have ordered corn from Hungary, where the harvest has been abundant. To encourage the importation of grain in Bohemia, I have promised, besides good prices, a premium of one hundred guilders for each well laden, four-horse wagon of grain that arrives before the expiration of three weeks."

"But the people will be exhausted before three weeks."

"I have also ordered the commissary store-houses to be opened in Prague, and the grain to be distributed."

"This will last but for a few days," returned Lacy, shaking his head.

"Then what can I do?" exclaimed the Emperor, sorrowfully.

"The famine is so great that it can scarcely have arisen from natural causes. Where scarcity is, there will always be found the extortioner, who profits by it. Those who have grain, are withholding it for higher prices."

"Woe to them, if I light upon their stores!" exclaimed Joseph, indignantly. "Woe to those who traffic in the fruits of the earth, which God has bestowed for the use of all men."

"Your Majesty will not find them. They will be carefully hidden away from your sight."

"I will seek until I find," replied the Emperor. "But look there, Lacy, what a stately dwelling rears its proud head beyond that grove of trees. Is it the setting sun that gilds the windows just now?"

"No, your Majesty, the light is from within. I suppose it is the castle of the nobleman, who owns the village."

They walked a few paces further, when the Emperor spoke again. "See, Lacy, here is a hut, from whose chimney I see smoke. Perhaps I shall find something to eat within."

He opened the door of the cottage, and there, on the floor, in a heap, lay a woman with four children. Their hollow eyes were fixed without the slightest interest upon the strangers, for they were in the last stage of hunger-typhus, and saw nothing.

Lacy hurried the Emperor away, saying, "Nothing can help these except death. I know this terrible fever. I saw it in Moravia in '62."

They stepped from the cottage to the kitchen. A fire was burning

in the chimney, and before it stood a man who was stirring the contents of a pot."

"God be praised!" exclaimed the Emperor, "here is food."

The man turned and showed a sunken, famished countenance.

"Do you want dinner?" said he roughly. "I have a mess in my pot that an Emperor might covet."

"He does covet it, my friend," said the Emperor, laughing. "What have you there?"

The man threw sinister glances at the well-dressed strangers, who jarred the funereal air of his cottage with untimely mirth.

"Did you come here to mock me?" said he. "Fine folks, like you, are after no good in a poor man's cottage. If you come here to pasture upon our misery, go into the house, and there you will see a sight that will rejoice the rich man's heart.

"No, my friend," replied the Emperor, soothingly, "we come to ask for a share of your supper."

The man broke out into a sardonic laugh. "My supper!" cried he. "Come, then, and see it. It is earth and water!"

"Earth and water!" cried the horror-stricken Joseph.

The peasant nodded. "Yes," said he, "the earth gives growth to the corn, and as I have got no corn, I am trying to see what it will do for me! We have already tasted grass. It is so green and fresh, and seems so sweet to our cattle, that we tried to eat the *sweet green grass*." And he smiled, but it was the smile of a demon.

"Oh, my God!" cried the Emperor.

"But it seems," continued the man, as though speaking to himself, "that God loves cattle better than he does men, for the grass which strengthens them, made us so sick, so sick, that it would have been a mercy if we had all died. It seems that we cannot die, however, so now I am going to eat the glorious earth. Hurrah! My supper is ready.

He swung the kettle upon the table and poured the black mass into a platter.

"Now," said he, with a fiendish grin, "now will the great folks like to sup with me?"

"Yes," said the Emperor, gravely, "I will taste of your supper."

He stepped to the table, and took the spoon which the bewildered peasant held out to him. Pale with excitement, the Emperor put the spoon to his mouth, and tasted. Then he reached it to Lacy.

"Taste it, Lacy," said he. "Oh, to think that these are men who suffer the pangs of starvation!" And completely overcome by his sorrowing sympathy, the Emperor's eyes overflowed with tears.

The peasant saw them and said, "yes, my lord, we are men, but God has forsaken us. He has been more merciful to the cattle, for they have all died."

"But how came this fearful famine among you?" asked Lacy. "Did you not plant corn?"

"How could we plant corn when we had none? For two years our crops have failed, and hunger has eaten our vitals until there is not a man in the village who has the strength to raise a fagot."

"But I saw a castle as we came thither," said Lacy.

"Yes, you saw the castle of the Baron Von Weifach. The whole country belongs to him; but we are free peasants. As long as we made anything we paid him our tithes. But we have nothing now."

And with a groan he sank down upon the wooden settle that stood behind him.

"The Baron does nothing for you then?"

"Why should he?" said the man, with a bitter laugh. "We pay no more tithes, and we are of no use to him. He prays every day for the famine to last, and God hears his prayers, for God forsakes the poor and loves the rich."

"But how does he profit by the famine?" asked Lacy.

"We have been profitable laborers to him, my lord. For several years past his corn-fields have been weighed down with golden tassels that made the heart leap with joy at sight of their beauty. He had so much that his barns would not hold it, and he had to put up other great barns, thatched with straw to shelter it. This year, it is true, that he has reaped nothing, but what of that. His barns are still full to overflowing."

"But how comes there such famine, when his barns are full of corn?" asked the Emperor, who was listening with intense interest.

"That is a question which does little honor to your head, sire," said the peasant, with a grating laugh. "The famine is so terrible in Bohemia precisely because the extortioners hold back their grain and will not sell it."

"But there is a law against the hoarding of grain."

"Yes, there are laws made so that the poor may be punished by them and the rich protected," said the peasant, with a sinister look. "Oh, yes, there are laws! The rich only have to say that they have no corn, and there the law ends."

"And you think that the Baron Von Weifach has grain?"

The peasant nodded. "I know it," said he, "and when the time comes, he will put it in the market."

"What time?"

"When the need of the people will be so great that they will part with their last acre of land or last handful of gold for a few bushels of grain. Several years ago, when corn was cheap, he sent his corn abroad to a country where the harvest had been short; but he will not do so this year, for the rich men have speculated so well that corn is dearer here than it is over the frontiers.* But I have enough of your questions. Let me alone and go about your business."

"Can you buy food with money?" asked the Emperor, kindly.

* Gross Hoffenger. *Life and reign of Joseph II.*, Vol. 1, page 188. Carl Ramshorn. *Life and times of Joseph II.*, page 99.

"Yes, indeed, sire," said the peasant, while a ray of hope entered the dark prison of his desponding heart. "If I had money, the house-keeper of the Baron would sell me bread, wheat, meat—oh, she would sell me anything if I had money to pay for it."

"Take this, then," said the Emperor, laying several gold pieces on the table. "I hope to bring you more permanent relief, later."

The peasant, with a cry, threw himself upon the gold. He paid no attention whatever to the donor. Shouting for joy at the same time that he was shedding tears in profusion, he darted, with his prize, to his starving wife and children to bid them live until he brought them food.

Without, stood the Emperor and Lacy. "Oh, God!" murmured he to himself, "and I have thought myself a most unhappy man! What is the grief of the heart to such bodily torture as this! Come, Lacy, come. The day of reckoning is here, and, by the eternal God, I will punish the guilty!"

"What means your Majesty?" asked Lacy, as the Emperor instead of returning to the village, strode forward towards the path that led to the castle.

"I mean to go at once to yonder castle," cried he, with a threatening gesture, "and my hand shall fall heavily upon the extortioner who withholds his grain from the people."

"But, your Majesty," urged Lacy, "the word of one discontented peasant is not enough to convict a man. You must have proofs before you condemn him."

—"True, Lacy, you are right. I must seek for proofs."

—"How, your Majesty?"

—"By going to the castle. My plan is already laid. As they seem to be feasting to-day, I am likely to find a goodly assemblage of rich men together. I must get an invitation to the feast, and once there, if the charge be just, I promise to furnish the proofs."

"Your Majesty's undertaking is not a safe one. I must, therefore, accompany you," said Lacy.

"No, Lacy, I intend that you shall meet me there. Return to the place where we left Rosenberg and the others, take one of the carriages, and drive with him to the castle. When you arrive there, ask for me, and say that you are now ready to proceed on our journey. Günther can remain with the mountaineers, and if our provisions arrive from Prague, he can dispatch a courier to let us know it."

"Shall we ask for your Majesty at the castle, sire?"

"Not by my own name. Ask for Baron Von Josephi, for by that title I shall introduce myself. Now farewell, and *au revoir*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EXTORTIONERS OF QUALITY.

THE drawing-room of the Freiherr Von Weifach was splendidly illuminated. Hundreds of wax lights were multiplied to infinity in the spacious mirrors that lined the walls, and separated from one another, the richly framed portraits of the Freiherr's noble ancestors. In the banquetting-hall, the dinner-table was resplendent with silver and gold, with porcelain and crystal. Flowers sent out their perfume from costliest vases of Dresden china, and rich old wines sparkled in goblets of glittering glass. Around the table sat a company of richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen of rank. They had been four hours at dinner, and the sense of enjoyment, springing from the satisfaction of the appetite, was not only visible on the flushed faces of the men, but betrayed itself upon the rosy-tinted faces of the elegant women who were their companions.

The dessert was on the table. The guests were indulging themselves in some of those post-prandial effusions, which are apt to blossom from heads overheated by wine, and are generally richer in words than in wisdom. The host, with flattering preliminaries, had proposed the health of the ladies, and every goblet sparkled to the brim. Just at that moment a servant entered the room and whispered a few words in his ear. He turned, smiling to his guests, and apologising for the interruption, said :

"Ladies and gentlemen, I leave it to you to decide the question just proposed to me. A gentleman has, at this moment, arrived at the castle, requesting permission to remain until some repairs can be made to his carriage, which has met with an accident in the neighboring village. Shall we invite him to join us while he awaits the return of his vehicle?"

"Let us not be rash in our hospitality," replied the Freiherrin, from the opposite side of the table. "In the name of the noble ladies assembled here, I crave to know whether the stranger who comes so sans façon to our castle, is worthy of the honor proposed by my husband. In other words, is he a personage of rank?"

"He presents himself as the Baron Von Josephi," said the Freiherr.

"One of the oldest families in Hungary!" exclaimed one of the guests.

"Then he can be admitted," responded the hostess. "At least if it be agreeable to the ladies."

Unanimous consent was given, and the Freiherr arose from his seat to convey the invitation to the stranger.

"The Baron Von Josephi!" said he, re-entering with the gentleman,

and leading him at once to the Freiherrin. She received him with smiling courtesy, while the rest of the company directed their glances towards him, anxious to see how he would acquit himself in his rather embarrassing position. He was perfectly self-possessed, and in every gesture showed himself to be a man of the world.

With quiet grace he took his seat at the side of the hostess, and, as he looked around, with his large, blue eyes, he seemed rather to be criticising than criticised. With a sharp, searching expression, his glances went from one of the company to another, until they, in their turn, felt not only embarrassed, but harassed and uneasy.

"I do not know why," whispered one of them to the lady who sat next him, "but this new-comer's face seems very familiar to me. I must have met him somewhere before this."

"You certainly might remember him," replied the lady, "if it were only for his beautiful eyes. I never saw such eyes in my life. His manners, too, are distinguished. I judge that he must have lived at court."

"In other words, you prefer a man who fawns at court to one who reigns like a prince over his own estates," said the first speaker, warmly. "I, for my part, ——"

"Hush! Let us hear what he is saying," interrupted the lady.

"I am under many obligations for your hospitality," said the Baron Von Josephi to the hostess. "For three days that I have travelled in Bohemia, I have met with nothing but poverty and starvation. Thanks to my entrance in to your splendid home, I see that plenty still reigns in the castle although it may have departed from the cottage."

"Yes, thank heaven, we know how to take care of our own interests here," said the Freiherr, laughing.

"And yet you see how things are exaggerated," replied the Baron Von Josephi, laughing. "Such dreadful tidings of the famine in Bohemia reached Vienna, that the Emperor is actually on his way to investigate the matter. I met him not far from Budweis, and he seemed very sad I thought."

"By the L——d, he has reason to feel sad," exclaimed one of the guests. "He will find nothing here for his howling subjects. He would have been wiser had he staid in Vienna!"

"Yes, poor, sentimental little Emperor!" cried another, with a laugh. "He will find that the stamp of his imperial foot is not quite heavy enough to conjure corn out of the earth, wherewith to feed his starving boors."

"I do not see why he should meddle with the boors at all," added a third. "Hungry serfs are easy to govern, they have no time to cry for their rights when they are crying for bread."

"If the gentlemen are going to talk of politics," said the hostess, rising from her seat, "it is time for ladies to retire. Come ladies, our cavaliers will join us when coffee is served."

The gentlemen rose, and not until the last lady had passed from the room did they resume their seats.

"And now, gentlemen," said Baron Von Josephi, "as our political gossip can no longer annoy the ladies, allow me to say to you that my presence here is not accidental, as I had led you to suppose."

"And to what are we indebted for the honor?" asked the host.

"I will explain," said the Baron, inclining his head. "You have received me with the hospitality of the olden time, without inquiring my rank, lineage or dwelling-place. Permit me to introduce myself. I have estates in Moravia, and they are contiguous to those of Count Hoditz."

"Then," replied Freiherr Von Weifach, "I sympathise with you, for nowhere in Austria has the famine been more severe."

"Severe, indeed! The poor are dying like flies, for they cannot learn to live upon grass."

"Neither will they learn to live upon it in Bohemia," said the Freiherr, laughing. "The people are so unreasonable. The noblest race-horse lives upon hay and grass; why should it not be good enough for a peasant of low degree?"

"Mere prejudice on the part of the peasant!" returned the Baron. "I have always suspected him of affectation. I have no patience with grumblers."

"You are right Baron," said his neighbor, nodding and smiling. "The people are idle and wasteful, and if we were to listen to their complaints, we would soon be as poor as they."

"And what if a few thousand perish here and there," interposed another. "They would never be missed, for they multiply like potatoes."

"You say, Baron," resumed the host, "that you paid no attention to the complaints of your peasantry?"

"I did like Ulyssus, gentlemen, I stopped my ears with wax, that my heart might not grow weak."

"A melodious syren song, to be sure," laughed the company, "a dirge of bread! bread! bread!"

"Ah, you know the song, I perceive," said the Baron Von Josephi, joining in the laugh.

—"Yes, and we did as you have done, Baron. We stopped our ears."

"The consequence is," continued Josephi, "that my granaries are full to overflowing. I was on my way to Prague to dispose of it, but the want, which I have seen on your estates, Freiherr, has touched my heart. Nowhere have I seen anything to equal it. Hundreds of starving peasants are on the high-road, not a mile off."

"Did you honor us with your presence to tell me this?" asked the host, with lowering brow. "If so, you might have spared your trouble, for I know it."

—"Oh, no, I came to you with the best intentions. I have no pity for the peasant, but some for yourself. The health of his workmen is the nobleman's wealth. Now my own people are almost all dead, and as I grieve to see your lands wasted, I offer you my corn."

"Which means that you wish me to buy it," said the Freiherr, with a significant smile.

—"Yes, and you can have it at once. I know that I might do better by waiting, but I have a tender heart and am willing to part with it now. I make you the offer."

"How much a *strich*?"* asked the Freiherr.

—"Twenty florins. You will find it cheap."

"Very cheap forsooth!" cried the host, with a loud laugh, in which his guests all joined. "You wish me to buy your corn for my peasants? Why, it will be worth its weight in gold, and they have none wherewith to pay me."

"You are a humane landlord and a nobleman, and I take it for granted that you will make it a gift to your peasantry."

"Why did you not do as much yourself?" asked the Freiherr, scornfully. "Have you not just now said that your people were dying while your granaries are full? No, no! I want no corn; but when corn has truly risen to twenty florins, then I shall open my granaries and my crops shall be for sale."

And the Freiherr filled his glass and drank a bumper.

"You should not speak so loud," said Josephi, "for you know that the Emperor has issued an edict, exacting that all those who have grain shall meet him in Prague, that the government may buy their grain at a reasonable price."

"What fool would heed such an edict?" cried the Freiherr. "The Emperor is not the master of our granaries. In the rural districts the nobleman is Emperor, and God forbid that it should ever be otherwise."

—"But the Emperor has appointed commissioners, who go from place to place, and inspect the crops."

—"Yes, they came hither, and they came to all of us, did they not my lords?"

—"Yes, yes," cried a chorus of merry noblemen.

—"But they found nothing—nothing but a few hundred florins that glided, unaccountably, into their hands, and caused them to abscond in a hurry. This people-loving Emperor deserves the eternal gratitude of his commissioners, for although they found no corn for him, they found an abundance of gold for themselves."

Josephi colored violently, and his whole frame trembled. His hand clutched the wine-glass which he had, and he seemed to breathe with difficulty.

No one observed it. The company were excited by wine, and their senses were dim and clouded. But for this sumptuous dinner, at which he had indulged himself too far, the Freiherr would never have betrayed the secret of his overflowing barns.

Josephi, meanwhile, controlled his indignation, and spoke again. "So Freiherr, you all reject my proposal."

"I do. God be praised I have enough and to spare."

* A *strich*, in Prague, was something more than two bushels.

"Then, gentlemen," continued the Baron, "I offer it to any one of you. You are all from this unhappy district and some one of you must be in need of grain."

"We are the Freiherr's neighbors and have borrowed his wisdom," said one of the company, "and I can answer for all present that they are well provided."

"There are seven of you present, and none needing grain!" exclaimed Von Josephi.

"Yes. Seven noblemen, all abounding in grain!"

"Seven extortioners!" cried Josephi, rising from his seat, and looking as if he would have stricken them to the earth with the lightning of his flashing eyes.

"What means this insolence?" asked the host.

"It means that I have found here seven men, of noble birth, who have disgraced their caste by fattening upon the misery of their fellows. But, by the eternal God, the extortioner shall be branded throughout the world! And be he gentle or base-born, he shall feel the weight of my just indignation."

While the Emperor spoke, the company had been awaking from the stupor caused by the quantity of wine they had been drinking. Gradually their heads were raised to listen, and their eyes shot fire, until at last, they sprang from their seats crying out, "who dares speak thus to us? By what right do you come to insult us?"

"By what right!" thundered the Emperor. "The Emperor has given me the right, the little chicken-hearted Emperor, whose commissioners you have bribed, and whose subjects you have oppressed, until nothing remains for him but to come among you and drag your infamy to daylight with his own hands."

"The Emperor! It is the Emperor!" groaned the terror-stricken extortioners, while Joseph looked contemptuously upon their pale and conscience-stricken faces."

Suddenly the host burst into a maudlin laugh. "Do you not see," said he, "that our facetious guest is making game of us to revenge himself for our refusal to buy his corn?"

"True, true!" cried the lords together. "It's a jest—a trick to——"

"Peace!" cried the Emperor, in a threatening voice. "The hour for jesting has passed by, and the hour of retribution is here. I came to Bohemia to feed my starving subjects, and I will feed them! But I shall also punish those who, having bread, have withheld it from the poor. You shall not bribe *me* either with your parchments of nobility or with your pride of family. The pillory is for the criminal, and his rank shall not save him."

"Mercy, gracious Sovereign, mercy!" cried the Freiherr, whose glowing cheeks were now as pale as death. "Your Majesty will not condemn us for the idle words we have spoken from excess of wine!"

"What mercy had you upon the wailing wretches, of whose misery you have made such sport to-day?"

"Your Majesty," said one of the noblemen, sullenly, "there is no law to prevent a man from holding his own, and the Bohemian nobleman has his own code of justice, and is amenable to no other."

"The Bohemian nobleman shall enjoy it no longer!" exclaimed the outraged Emperor. "Before their earthly judges, men shall be equal, as they are before the throne of God."

At that moment the door opened and the Emperor's *suite* came in.

"Lacy, Lacy!" cried Joseph, "you were right. The famine is not the result of a short harvest, it is due to these monsters of wickedness, whom you see before you in the enjoyment of every luxury that sensuality can crave."

"Mercy, sire, mercy!" cried a chorus of imploring voices, and looking behind him, the Emperor saw the ladies, who all sank upon their knees at his feet. While Joseph had been speaking with Lacy, the lord of the castle had hastened to communicate their disgrace, and to bring the wives of the criminals to their assistance.

The Emperor frowned. "Ladies," said he, "we are on the subject of politics, the same subject which banished you hence not long ago.— Rise, therefore, and retire: this is no place for you."

"No, sire!" cried the Freiehrin Von Weifach, "I will not rise until I obtain pardon for my husband. I do not know of what he has been guilty, but I know that our noble Emperor cannot condemn the man under whose roof he has come as an invited guest. I know that the Emperor is too generous to punish him, who confiding in him as a man, little suspected that he who came under a borrowed name, was the sovereign lord of all Austria!"

"Ah, madam, you reproach me with an hour spent at your table, and you expect me to overlook crime in consideration of the common courtesy extended to me as a man of your own rank! I was so fortunate as to overhear the little discussion that preceded my entrance here. Rise, madam, I am not fond of Spanish customs. I don't like to see women on their knees."

"Mercy for my husband!" reiterated the Freiherrin. "Forgive him for thinking more of his own family than of others. What he did was for love of his wife and children."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Emperor, "you call that love of his family!— You would elevate his cruel avarice into a domestic virtue! I congratulate you upon your high standard of ethics! But rise, I command you. Meanwhile you are right on one point at least. I have eaten of your salt, and I am too true a nobleman to betray you to the Emperor. I will merely tell him that the corn is found, and that his poor people may rejoice. Open your granaries, therefore, my lords. Let each of you, this night, send a courier to your tenants, proffering grain to all free of charge, stipulating only that as a return for the gift, the peasantry shall bestow a portion of their corn upon their mother earth.* You will see how magical is the effect of generosity. Your stores will

* Gross Hoffinger, vol. 1. page 141.

scatter blessings over this unhappy land, and the poor will bless you as their benefactors. Yes, gentlemen, from this day forward, you will be the friends of the needy, for, God be praised, you have corn, and for the sake of your corn I forgive you. But see that the future makes full atonement for the past."

No one answered a word. With sullen mien and downcast eyes they stood, while the Emperor surveyed them with surprise.

"What?" said he, after a long and painful pause, "not a word of thanks! Joy has made you dumb, I perceive. And no wonder; for to feel (for the first time) the pleasures of benevolence may well make you speechless with happiness. As for you, madam," continued the Emperor, addressing his hostess, "I will not deprive you of a share in your husband's generosity. You will be so kind as to call up your servants and bid them load a wagon with the remains of our excellent dinner, not forgetting the wines, and you will then send it, with your greetings, to your tenants in yonder village. Your servants can go from house to house until the store is exhausted."

"I will do what your Majesty commands," said the *Freiherrin*, pale with rage.

"I do not doubt it," replied the Emperor, laughing. "And as I will be glad to hear how your bounty is received in the village, two of my own attendants will accompany yours. Farewell, my lords, I must leave you, for I have a large company on the high-road whom I have invited to supper. The *Freiherrin* will oblige me by receiving them to-night as her guests. In this stately castle there are, doubtless, several rooms that can be thrown open to these weary, suffering mountaineers. Have I your permission to send them hither?"

"I will obey your Majesty's commands," sobbed the lady, no longer able to control her tears.

The Emperor bowed, and turning to his attendants said, "come, my friends, our messengers have probably arrived before this, and our guests await us."

He advanced to the door, but suddenly stopped and addressed the company. "My lords," said he, "for once your wisdom has been at fault. It is well that the sentimental little Emperor did not remain, as you advised, in Vienna; for the stamp of his imperial foot has struck abundance out of the earth, and it will suffice to save the lives of his starving boors."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DIPLOMATIC ESOTERICS.

PRINCE KAUNITZ was in his cabinet. Baron Binder was reading aloud the secret dispatches which had just come in from the Austrian Ambassador at Berlin, the young Baron Van Swieten. Meanwhile, Kaunitz was busy with a brush of peacock's feathers, dusting the expensive trifles that covered his *escritoire*, or polishing its ebony surface with a fine silk handkerchief which he kept for the purpose. This furbishing of trinkets and furniture was a private pastime with the all-powerful Minister; and many a personage of rank was made to wait in the ante-room, while he finished his dusting, or re-arranged his *bijouterie*, until it was grouped to his satisfaction.

The dispatches which were being read, were of the highest importance, for they related to a confidential conversation with the King of Prussia on the subject of the political apple, at which all were striving to get the largest bite. The King of Prussia, wrote the Ambassador, had spoken jestingly of the partition of Poland. He had bespoken for himself the district of Netz and Polish Prussia, premising that Dantzic, Thorn and Cracow were to be left to Poland.

"Very well arranged," said Kaunitz, with his accustomed *sang-froid*, while he brightened the jewels of a Sèvres ink-stand, which had been presented to him by Madam de Pompadour. "*Vraiment the naiveté* of this Frederic is prodigious. He appropriates the richest and most cultivated districts of Poland to himself, and then inserts, as an unimportant clause, the stipulation that Cracow, with its adjacent territory, the rich salt mines of Wieliczka, shall *not* belong to Austria."

"Van Swieten would not agree to the arrangement," said Binder, "and he furthermore declared to the King that such a distribution would be prejudicial to Austria. He proposed, however, that Austria might be indemnified by the possession of Bosnia and Servia, which the Porte should be made to yield."

"What a preposterous fool," exclaimed Kaunitz. "Who gave him the right to make such a proposition?"

"Why, your Highness, I suppose he thought——"

"He has no right to think," interrupted Kaunitz. "I ask of no employee of mine to think. My envoys have nothing to do but to work out *my* thoughts, and that without any intervention of their own fancies. It is very presuming in my little diplomatic agents to think what I have not thought, and of their own accord to make propositions to foreign courts. Write and tell him so, Binder, and add that neither our perma-

ment peaceful relations with Turkey, nor the sentiments of consideration which are entertained by the Empress for the Porte, will allow of any attempt to lessen his territory.”*

“Then you are really in earnest, and intend to be a firm ally of the Porte?” inquired Binder with astonishment.

“In earnest!” repeated Kaunitz with a shrug. “You statesman in swaddling-clothes, you do not know the first principles of your profession, and yet you have lived with me for thirty years! In diplomacy there is no such thing as stability of policy. Policy shapes itself according to circumstances and changes as they change. The man who attempted to follow fixed principles in international policy, would soon find himself and his government on the verge of a precipice.”

“And yet there is no statesman in Europe who adheres so closely to his principles as yourself,” exclaimed Binder with the enthusiasm of true friendship.

Kaunitz inclined his head majestically. “My principles are these. To make Austria rich, great, powerful. Austria shall be *quocunque modo*, the first power in Europe; and in after years the world shall say that the genius of Kaunitz placed her on the mountain peaks of her greatness. For this end, it is indispensable that I remain at the head of European affairs. Not only Austria, but all Europe looks to me to guide her through the storm that is threatening the general peace. I dare not leave the helm of state to take one hour’s rest, for what would become of the great continental ship, if, seeking my own comfort, I were to retire and yield her fortunes to some unsteady hand? There is no one to replace me! No one! It is only once in a century that Heaven vouchsafes a great statesman to the world. This makes me fear for Austria when I shall have gone from earth and there is no one to succeed me.”†

“May you live many years to rule in Austria!” cried Binder warmly. “You are indispensable to her welfare.”

“I know it,” said Kaunitz gravely. “But there are aspirants for political fame in Austria, who would like to lay their awkward hands upon the web that I weave. No one knows how far the youthful impetuosity and boundless vanity of such ambition may go. It might lead its possessor to entertain the insane idea that he could govern Austria without my guidance.”

“You speak of the Emperor Joseph?”

“Yes, I do. He is ambitious, overbearing, and vain. He mistakes his stupid longings to do good, for capacity. He lusts for fame through war and conquest, and would change everything in his mother’s empire, for the mere satisfaction of knowing that the change was his own work. Oh, what would become of Austria if I were not by to keep him within bounds! It will task all my genius to steer between the Scylla of a bigotted, peace-loving Empress and the Charybdis of this reckless Em-

* Wilhelm Von Dohm’s *Memoirs of My Time*; vol. 1, page 489.

† The Prince’s own words. See Swinburne. vol. 1, page 270.

peror: to reconcile their antagonisms and overrule their prejudices. Maria Theresa is for peace and for a treaty with the Porte, who has always been a good-natured harmless neighbor—Joseph thirsts for war that he may enlarge his dominions and parade himself before the world as a military genius. If his mother were to die to-morrow, he would plunge headlong into a war with Russia or with Turkey, whichever one he might happen to fancy. I am obliged forever to hold this prospect before his eyes to keep him quiet. I must also pay my tribute to the whims of the reigning Empress, and if we declare war to pacify Joseph, we must also make it appear to Maria Theresa that war was inevitable.”

“By heaven, that is a delicate web indeed!” cried Binder laughing.

“Yes, and let no presuming hand ever touch a thread of it,” replied Kaunitz. “I say as much as I have said to you, Binder, because the greatest minds *must* sometimes find a vent for their conceptions, and I trust nobody on earth except you. Now you know what I mean by ‘permanent treaties with the Porte,’ and I hope you will not ask any more silly questions. You ignoramus, that have lived so long with Kaunitz and have not yet learned to know him!”

“Your Highness is beyond the comprehension of ordinary men,” said Binder with a good-humored smile.

“I believe so,” replied Kaunitz with truthful simplicity, while he carefully placed his paper, pens, lines and penknife in the drawer wherein they belonged.

The door opened and a servant announced his Excellency Osman Pascha, Ambassador of the Ottoman Porte.

“Very well,” replied Kaunitz with a nod, “I will see him presently.”

“You see,” said he to Binder, as the door closed upon the servant, “we are about to begin in earnest with the Porte. I shall receive him in the drawing-room. Meanwhile, remain here, for I shall need you again.”

He smiled kindly upon his friend and left the room. Binder looked after him with tenderest admiration. “He is a very great man,” said he to himself, “and he is right. Austria would fall to the rank of a second power but for him. What if he does know it and boast of it? He is a truthful and candid man! *Voilà tout.*”

And he sat down to write to Van Swieten in Berlin to beware of saying anything prejudicial to the interests of the Porte.

He had just concluded his letter when Kaunitz returned. His countenance was beaming with satisfaction and his lips were half parting with a smile. “Binder,” said he, laying a roll of papers on the *escritoire*, “here are sugar plums for the Emperor. Can you guess what I have in these papers?”

“Not a declaration of war from Russia!” exclaimed Binder.

—“Hm; something very like it, I assure you. Listen! It is the secret treaty which our Minister at Constantinople, Herr Von Thugut, has just concluded with the Porte. The Sultan has already signed it, and to-day I shall present it for signature to the Empress. She will do

it readily, for although she may not absolutely doat on the Infidel, she hates Russia; and the unbelieving Turk is dearer to her than her Christian cousin, the Empress Catharine."

"Then after all we are the firm allies of Turkey," said Binder.

The Prince gave a shrug, and trifled with the papers he had brought with him. "We have bound ourselves," said he, reading here and there among the leaves, "to bring about a peace between Russia and Turkey, by which the former shall restore to the latter all the provinces which she has conquered from the Porte; or if not all, those which are indispensable to preserve the honor of Turkey intact. We have furthermore bound ourselves to secure the independence of the Republic of Poland."

"But, Prince, that contradicts all your previous understandings with Prussia and Russia; it contradicts your plans for the partition of Poland. It will certainly lead to war, for your Highness has forgotten that Prussia and Russia have already agreed for the *soi-disant* pacification of Poland, to appropriate the greater part of her provinces to themselves.

"I beg you to believe, my verdant friend, that I never forget anything," said Kaunitz somewhat haughtily. "I am perfectly *au fait* to the Russo-Prussian treaty; but I have not been invited to the banquet, and I do not intend to go uninvited. When they speak, we will consider their offers. If they say nothing, we go to war. If they speak, we will allow ourselves to be persuaded to share the booty which we cannot restore to its owners. In that way, we are in a manner forced into this coalition and the opprobrium of the act falls upon those who devised it, while Maria Theresa's scruples will be more easily overcome."

"Prince," said Binder with a sigh, "I give it up. I never will make a statesman. I listen to your words as to a Delphic oracle and do not pretend to understand their ambiguous meaning. I understand, however, do I not, that we are the allies of the Sultan? Now we thereby do him a great favor, what does he give in return?"

"Not much, but still something," said Kaunitz with composure, while his fingers again turned over the leaves. "The Porte, who like yourself, apprehends war with Russia, understands that if Austria is to befriend him, she must put her army upon a war-footing. If Austria is to do this for the sake of Turkey, Turkey of course must furnish the means. The Porte then, in the course of the next eight months, will pay us the sum of twenty thousand purses, each containing five hundred silver piastres. Four thousand purses will be paid down as soon as the treaty is signed.*

"Ten million of piastres!" exclaimed Binder, with uplifted hands. "By heaven, Prince, you are a second Moses. You know how to strike a rock so that a silver fountain will gush from its barrenness."

—"I shall make good use of it, too. Our coffers need replenishing, and the Emperor will rejoice to see them filled with the gold of the Infidel."

* Dehm's *Memoires of My Time*: vol. 1. page 471.

del. It will enable him to raise and equip a gallant army, and that will give him such unbounded delight that we are sure of his signature. Besides this, the Porte presents us with a goodly portion of Wallachia, he fixes the boundaries of Transylvania to our complete satisfaction, and allows us free trade with the Ottoman empire, both by land and by water."

"But all these concessions will cost us a war with Russia. The rapacious Czarina will be furious when she hears of them."

"She will not hear of them," said Kaunitz quietly. "I have made it a stringent condition with Osman Pascha that the treaty with Turkey shall be a profound secret. The Sultan and his vizier have pledged their word, and the Mussalman may always be trusted. We will only make the treaty public, in case of a war with Russia."

—"Whence it follows that as Russia is much more likely to court our friendship than our enmity, the treaty with the Porte is all moonshine."

"With the exception of the ten million of piastres which are terrestrial and tangible. It remains now to see whether Turkey will keep silence or Russia will speak! In either case, the peace of all Europe now lies in Austria's hands. We will preserve or destroy it as is most advantageous to our own interests."

At that moment the door leading to the ante-room was opened and a page announced Prince Gallitzin, Ambassador of her Majesty the Empress of Russia!

This announcement following the subjects which had been under discussion, was so significant, that Kaunitz could not conceal his sense of its supreme importance. He was slightly disturbed; but recovering himself almost instantaneously he said,

"In five minutes I will receive his Highness in this room. Now be gone, and open the door punctually."

"What can the Russian Minister want to-day?" said Binder.

"He has come to speak at last," replied Kaunitz, taking breath.

"Not of the partition of Poland but of your Turkish treaty. You will see that the Porte will not keep silence, if he gain anything by talking."

"Three minutes gone," said Kaunitz, taking out his watch. "Not another word, Binder. Step behind that screen and listen to our discussion. It will save me the trouble of repeating it to you."

While Binder was concealing himself, Kaunitz was composing his visage before a looking-glass. It soon reached its accustomed serenity and not a lock of the perruque was out of place.

In five minutes the page re-opened the door and announced the entrance of the Russian Ambassador.

CHAPTER XXX.

RUSSIA SPEAKS.

PRINCE KAUNITZ stood in the centre of the room when the Russian Minister made his appearance. He raised his cold blue eyes with perfect indifference to the smiling face of the Russian, who bowed low, while his host vouchsafed him a slight inclination of the head. Prince Gallitzin seemed to be as unconscious of this haughty reception as of the fact that Kaunitz had not moved forward a single step to greet him. He traversed with unruffled courtesy the distance that separated him from Austria, and gave his hand with the grace of a finished courtier.

Kaunitz raised his hand languidly and allowed it to rest for a moment in the palm of his cordial visitor.

"See, what a propitious incident," said Prince Gallitzin. "Austria and Russia have given one another the hand."

"Pardon me, your Highness," replied Kaunitz gravely, "Russia has offered her hand, and Austria takes it."

"But without returning my cordial pressure," said the Russian.

Prince Kaunitz affected not to hear this affectionate reproach. He pointed to the arm-chairs on either side of the escritoire saying, "let us be seated."

Prince Gallitzin waited until Kaunitz had taken his seat, which he did in a most deliberate manner, then he took the chair opposite.

"Your Highness has been so good as to look over the new proposals for peace which Russia has offered to Turkey?" asked Prince Gallitzin.

"I have read them," replied Kaunitz curtly.

"—Your Highness will then have remarked that accomodating herself to the wishes of Austria, Russia has retained only such of her conditions as were necessary to the preservation of her dignity before the world. But my imperial mistress has instructed me to say explicitly that her moderation towards Turkey is exclusively the fruit of her consideration for Austria. But for this consideration Turkey would have felt the full weight of the Empress's vengeance; and it might have come to pass that this Porte, who already totters with his own weakness, would have been precipitated by Russia far into the depths of the Black Sea."

"—In that case Russia would have learned that Austria is a diver who knows how to fish for pearls. We would have rescued the Porte from the Black Sea, and if he were not strong enough to sustain himself, we would have exacted a tonic at your hands in the form of more advantageous conditions of peace."

"Then our conditions are not satisfactory?"

"They are of such a nature that Austria cannot entertain them for a moment. Turkey can never consent to the independence of the Crimea and Wallachia, nor will Austria counsel her to such an indiscreet concession. This would be so contrary to the interests of Austria that we would oppose it, even should Turkey be forced by untoward circumstances to yield the point."

"Ah!" cried Gallitzin laughing, "Austria would find herself in the singular position of a nation warring with another to force that nation to take care of its own interests. Will your Highness then tell me what are the conditions which Austria is willing to accept for Turkey?"

—"They are these. That the right of the Sultan to appoint the Khan of Crimea and the Hospodar of Wallachia remain untouched. If Russia will recognise the sovereignty of the Porte in that quarter, then Austria will induce him to withdraw his pretensions in Tartary."

"And to leave to Russia at least the territory she has conquered there?" asked Gallitzin with his ineffable smile. "The Czarina has no desire to enlarge her vast empire. Russia does not war in the Crimea for herself, but for a noble race of men who feel rich and powerful enough to elect their own rulers. Her struggle in Tartary is simply that of civilization and freedom against barbarism and tyranny."

"How beautiful all this sounds in the mouth of a Russian," said Kaunitz, smiling. "You will acknowledge that Russia is not always consistent; for instance—in Poland, where she does not perceive the right of a noble race of men to elect their own rulers, but forces upon them a king whom they all despise. I must now declare to you that my Sovereign will enter into negotiations with Turkey on one condition only: that the territorial rights of Poland be left untouched, not only by Russia, but by any other European power.*"

Prince Gallitzin stared at Kaunitz as he heard these astounding words, but the Austrian met his gaze with perfect unconcern.

"Your Highness defends the integrity of Polish territory," said Gallitzin, after a short pause, "and yet you have been the first to invade it. Is not the Zips a portion of the Kingdom of Poland?"

"No, your Highness, no. The Zips was originally a Hungarian dependency, and was mortgaged to Poland. We intend to resume our property and pay the mortgage in the usual way. This is not at all to the point. We speak of the fate of Poland. As for Austria, she aims at nothing but her rights, and as soon as the Empress of Russia withdraws her troops from Polish ground, we will withdraw ours as well as all pretensions whatever to the smaller portion of Polish territory."

"And doubtless your Highness intends to restore everything for which the Poles are now contending. Her ancient Constitution, for instance; that Constitution which has been thrown upon the political system of Europe like the apple of Eres, threatening discord and conflict without end."

"No," said Kaunitz, quickly, "their Constitution must be modified

* V. Dehm's Memoirs, vol. 1, page 432.

as the interests of their neighbors may require. We must unite on some modifications that are suitable to us, and if Poland refuses to accept them, she must be forced to do it."

"Ah!" cried Gallitzin, much relieved, "if your Highness is of this mind, we will soon understand one another, and I may, therefore, be permitted to speak with perfect frankness on the part of Russia."

"At last!" exclaimed Kaunitz, taking a long breath. "Russia will speak at last! So far, she has only acted, and I confess that her actions have been inexplicable."

"Russia keeps pace with Austria," said Gallitzin. "The Court of Vienna says that the integrity of Poland must be respected; nevertheless she is the first to lay her hand upon it."

"Some things we dare not do, because they seem too difficult—others only seem to be difficult because we dare not do them. We have taken our slice of Poland because it belonged to us, and the difficulty of the step has not deterred us."

"Ah, your Highness, as regards your right to the Zips, there is not a kingdom in Europe that has not some old forgotten right to her neighbor's territory! Russia and—Prussia, too, have similar claims on Poland, so that if it be agreeable to the Empress-Queen and to—your Highness, we will meet together to have an understanding on the subject. Some little time may be required to define our several claims, but this once settled, there will be no further difficulty in the way."

"I see," said Kaunitz, with a satisfied air, "that we already understand one another. As Russia has spoken, and has made proposals, Austria is ready to respond. But before we attend to our own affairs, let us give peace to Turkey. The Court of Vienna will negotiate between you. Let me advise you to be exorbitant in your demands; go somewhat beyond your real intentions, so that Austria may be obliged to decline your proposals."

"And, in this way, your Highness proposes to bring about a peace with Turkey?" asked Prince Gallitzin, astounded.

"Certainly I do. Austria declines the proposals; Russia moderates her demands, that is, she concedes what she never intended to exact, and presents this as her ultimatum. Austria, satisfied with the concessions now offered to her ally, is of the opinion that he should accept them, and if he prove unreasonable, must force him to do it."

"Your Highness is indeed a great statesman!" exclaimed Gallitzin, with enthusiasm.

"When a Russian Ambassador says so, it must be true," replied Kaunitz, bowing. "As to Poland, the great question there, is to preserve the balance of power. I beg, therefore, that Russia and Prussia will make known at once the extent of their claims there, that Austria may shape hers accordingly. I shall enter at once into correspondence with the King of Prussia, to ascertain his views as to the future boundaries of Poland. Two things are indispensable to ensure the success of this affair."

—“What are they?”

“First: perfect frankness between the three Powers who are to act as one, and celerity of action, lest Poland should be quieted before we come in with *our* remedy.”

“I agree with you. And second?”

“Second: profound secrecy. If France or England were to scent the affair, there would be troublesome intervention, and we might all be disappointed. Europe must not learn the partition of Poland until it is a *fait accompli*.”

“I promise discretion both for Russia and Prussia,” said Gallitzin, eagerly. “Europe shall not hear of it until our troops are on the spot to defend us from outside interference. All that is necessary now, is to find three equal portions so that each claimant shall be satisfied.”

“Oh,” said Kaunitz, carelessly, as he played with the lace that edged his cuffs, “If three equal parts are not to be found on Polish ground, we can trespass upon the property of another neighbor who has too much land, and if he resists, we can very soon bring him to reason.”

Prince Gallitzin looked with visible astonishment at the cold and calm face of the Austrian. “Another neighbor?” echoed he, with embarrassment. “But we have no neighbor unless it be the Porte himself.”

“He is precisely the neighbor to whom I have reference,” said Kaunitz, nodding his head. “He is almost as troublesome as Poland, and will be the better for a little blood-letting. I authorize your Highness to lay these propositions before your court, and await the answer.”

“Oh!” cried Gallitzin, laughing, while he arose from his chair, “you will always find Russia ready for a surgical operation upon the body of her hereditary enemy. The law, both of nature and of necessity, impels her to prey upon Turkey, and the will of Peter the Great can never be carried out until the foot of Russia rests upon the Sultan’s throne, at Stamboul.”

“Well,” said Kaunitz, when Prince Gallitzin had taken his leave, “did you understand our conference, Binder?”

“Understand!” exclaimed Binder, coming from behind the screen.—“No, indeed! I must have been drunk or dreaming. I surely did not hear your Highness, who, not an hour since, concluded a treaty with Turkey, by which the independence of Poland was to be guaranteed, I surely did not hear you agree to a partition between Russia, Prussia and Austria!”

—“Yes you did. We are driven to accept our share of Poland merely by way of decreasing that of our neighbors.”

“Then I *did* understand as regards Poland. But I must have been dreaming when I thought you had told me that we had concluded a treaty with the Porte, by which he pays us ten millions of piastres for our good offices with Russia.”

“Not at all. I certainly told you so.”

“Then, dear Prince, I have lost my senses,” cried Binder, “for indeed

I dreamed that you had proposed to Russia, that in case there was not land enough to satisfy you all in Poland, to take some from the Sultan."

"You have heard aright. You are very tiresome with your questions and your stupid, wonder-stricken face. I suppose if a piece of Poland were thrown at your feet, you would pick it up and hand it over to Stanislaus; and if the Porte stood before you with a million of piasters, you would say, 'not for the world!' It is easy to see what would become of Austria in your dainty hands! An enviable position she would hold, if conscience were to guide her policy!"

"No danger while *you* hold the reins, for there will never be a trace of conscience in your policy," muttered Binder, gathering up his papers and passing into the adjoining room.

Prince Kaunitz shrugged his shoulders and rang his bell.

"My new state-coach!" said he to Hippolyte, who, instead of flying off as usual to obey, remained standing at the door.

"Why do you stand there?" asked the Prince.

"Pardon me, your Highness, the state-coach is not ready," stammered the valet.

"Not yet ready?" repeated the Prince, accenting each word. "Did I not order it to be here at two o'clock?"

"Yes, your Highness, but the upholsterer could not understand the drawings which were given him. He began to work by them, but was obliged to undo his work, and this caused the delay."

"The man has the assurance to say that he could not work after the drawings made by my own hand?" asked Kaunitz, with a fiery glance of anger in his eyes. "Because he is an ass, does the churl dare to criticise *my* drawings! Let him bring the body of the coach to the palace and I will show him that he is a bungler and knows nothing of his trade."

And the Prince, in his rage, stalked to the door. Suddenly he stopped. "What is the state of the thermometer to-day?" said he.

The valet flew to the window and examined the little thermometer that hung outside.

"Twelve degrees, your Highness."

"Twelve degrees," sighed the Prince, "then I dare not go to the coach house. Is the coach mounted on the wheels?"

"No, your Highness."

"Then let the upholsterer have the carriage brought to my room, with the drawings and his tools. Be off! In ten minutes all must be here!"

Just ten minutes later the door opened, and in came a hand-barrow, upon which stood the body of the coach. It was one mass of bronze, plate-glass mirrors, and gilding. Behind it appeared the upholsterer, pale with fright, carrying on one arm a bundle of satin and velvet and in his right hand holding the drawing of the Prince.

"Set it down in the centre of the room," said Kaunitz, imperiously, and then turning a look of wrath upon the unhappy upholsterer, he said, with terrible emphasis,

"Is it true that you have the audacity to say that you cannot work after my drawings?"

"I hope your Highness will forgive me," stammered the upholsterer, "but there is not room in the inside of the coach for all the bows and rosettes. I would have been obliged to make them so small that the coach would have looked like one of the patterns we show to our customers."

"And you dare tell me that to my face? Do you suppose that I do not know your miserable trade, or do you mean that it is easier to govern an empire than to trim up a coach? I will prove to you that I am a better upholsterer than you are. Open the door and I will decorate the coach myself."

The upholsterer opened the richly gilded glass door, and Kaunitz, as much in earnest as when he had been giving and taking a kingdom, entered the coach and seated himself.

"Give me the satin and velvet and hold up the drawings, that I may work after them. Some of you, hand me the nails, and some one have the needle ready. You shall see how Prince Kaunitz, through the stupidity of his upholsterer, is obliged to decorate the interior of his own coach."

The Prince began to work; and in the same room where he had signed treaties and received ambassadors, the great Austrian statesman sewed and hammered until he had decorated his carriage to his own satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST PETITION.

MARIA THERESA paced her cabinet in visible agitation. Her face was sad beyond expression, and her eyes turned anxiously towards the door.

"I tremble," murmured she; "for the first time in my life I mistrust the deed I am about to do. All is not clear in the depths of my conscience; the voice that whispers such misgivings to my heart, is one which shames the worldly wisdom of my counsellors. We are about to do a wicked deed, and we shall answer for it before heaven! Would that my right hand had lost its cunning, ere ever it had been forced to sign this cruel document. Oh, it is an unholy thing, this alliance with an unbelieving King and a dissolute Empress! And an alliance for what! To destroy a kingdom, and to rob its unhappy people of their nationality forever!"

"But what avails remorse?" continued she, heaving a deep sigh. "It

is too late, too late! In a few moments Joseph will be here to exact my signature, and I dare not refuse it. I have yielded my right to protest against this crime and—ah! he comes,” cried the Empress, pressing her hands upon her heart as she heard the lock of the door turning.

She fell into an arm-chair and trembled violently. But it was not the Emperor who appeared as the door opened; it was the Baroness Von Salmour, governess to the Archduchesses.

“Baroness!” cried the Empress, “it must be something of most imminent importance that brings you hither. What is it?”

“I come in the name of misfortune to ask of your Majesty a favor,” said the Baroness, earnestly.

“Speak then, and speak quickly.”

“Will your Majesty grant an audience to my unhappy country-woman, the Countess Wielopolska?”

“The Countess Anna,” said the Empress, with a shudder. Then, as if ashamed of her agitation, she added quickly.

“Admit her. If the Emperor comes, let him enter also.”

The Baroness courtesied and withdrew, but she left the door open, and now was seen advancing the tall and graceful figure of the Countess.—Her face was pale as that of the dead. She still wore her black velvet dress, and the long veil which fell around her person, hovered about her like a dark, storm-heralding cloud.

“She looks like the angel of death,” murmured the Empress. “It seems to me that if those pale, transparent hands, which she folds over her breast, were to unclasp, her icy breath would still the beatings of my heart forever!”

The Countess glided in like a vision, and the door closed behind her. The Empress received her with an affable smile.

“It is very long since I have seen you,” said the proud Maria Theresa, with an embarrassment to which her rank had hitherto made her a stranger.

“I was waiting to be summoned by your Majesty,” replied the Countess.

“And as I did not summon you, you came voluntarily. That was kind. I am very glad to see you.”

The lady replied to these flattering words by an inclination of the head, and a pause ensued. Each one seemed waiting for the other to speak. As the Empress perceived, after awhile, that the lips of the pale Countess did not move, she resolved to break the irksome silence herself. In her own frank way, scorning all circumlocution, she went at once to the subject nearest their hearts.

“I know why you are here to-day,” said she, with a painful blush.—“You have heard of the fate which threatens Poland, and you have come to ask if thus I fulfil the promises I made to you! Speak—is it not so? Have I not rightly read the meaning of that lovely, but joyless face?”

“It is so,” sighed the Countess, and her voice trembled with unshed

years. "Yes, from the solitude wherein I had buried my grief since last I saw your Majesty, I have heard the fatal tidings of my country's woe, and yet I live! Oh, why should the body survive when the soul is dead!"

Her words died away upon her lips, and she seemed to grow paler and more pale, as though every drop of blood in her veins had stiffened and turned to ice. But she heaved a sigh and rallied, for hope now touched her heart, and the statue awoke to life.

"Ah, great Empress," said she, with fervor, "I come to you, in whose powerful hand lies the issue of my country's fate, whose mighty word can bid us live or doom us to death."

"Oh, were it so, you would not sue in vain!" cried the Empress, sorrowfully. "Had the fate of Poland lain in *my* hands, she would have risen triumphant from the arena, where she has battled so bravely for her sacred rights!"

"Poland's fate lies in your Majesty's hand!" exclaimed the Countess, vehemently. "You have not yet signed the warrant for my country's execution; you are still innocent of her blood; your hand is still free from participation in the crime of her enemies and yours! Oh, let me kiss that hand, and bless it while yet it is spotless and pure as your noble heart."

Hurried away by the might of the sorrow that overwhelmed her, the Countess darted forward, and throwing herself at the feet of the Empress, drew her hand fervently to her lips.

"Rise, dear Countess Anna, rise," said the Empress, soothingly. "I cannot bear to see you at my feet when I can do nothing to avert the fate of Poland."

"Who, then, can help her if not your Majesty!" cried the Countess. "Oh, I did not come hither to reproach you, I came but to entreat for the word that will disenthral my country!"

"I cannot do it, as God hears me, I cannot," repeated Maria Theresa, in a voice of anguish. "I have striven against it with all my might. What I have suffered for your countrymen, no one will ever know! The anxious days and wretched nights that I have spent for their sakes, have threatened my life."*

"I CANNOT!" echoed the Countess, who seemed to have heard nothing but these few words. "An Empress!—An Empress! who, with a wave of her hand, sways millions of men, and is responsible for her actions to no earthly power!"

—"Save that which resides in the rights of her subjects over the sovereign that is bound to reign for their good. I am responsible to my people for the preservation of peace. Too much blood has been shed since I came to the throne; and nothing would induce me to be the cause that the soil of Austria should be crimsoned by another drop."†

"And to spare a drop of Austrian blood, your Majesty will deal the

* The Empress's own words. See Raumer, Contributions to Modern History, vol. 4, page 589.

† The Empress's own words. See Wolf, Austria under Maria Theresa, page 527.

blow that murders a whole nation!" cried the Countess, rising to her feet and looking defiance at the Empress. "In your egotism for Austria, you turn from a noble nation who have as good a right to freedom as your own people!"

—"Countess, you forget yourself. By what right do you reprove me?"

"By the right which Misfortune gives to Truth," replied she, proudly, "and by the right which your imperial word has given me to speak.—For now I recall to you that promise, and I ask where is the eagle that was to swoop down upon the vultures which are preying upon Poland?"

"Oh, they have caged the eagle," said the Empress, sadly. "God in heaven knows how manfully I have battled for Poland. When I threatened interference, the answer was this: 'We have resolved to dismember Poland, and you shall not prevent us.' What, then, could I do? Declare war? That were to ruin my people. Remain passive, while my enemies enlarged their frontiers, so as to endanger my own? We then had recourse to stratagem. We defended our soil inch by inch, and gave up when resistance became fanaticism. We required for our share more than we desired, hoping to be refused. But no! To my sorrow and disappointment, even more was apportioned than we had claimed. Oh! the whole thing has been so repugnant to my sense of justice that I refused to take any share in its arrangements, and all negotiations have been conducted by the Emperor, Prince Kaunitz and Marsnal Lacy."*

"And these are the ashes of the mighty promises of Emperors and Empresses!" exclaimed the Countess, bitterly. "Oh, Empress, think of the time when you shall appear before God, to give account of your deeds! How will you answer when the record of this day is brought before you? For the last time I am at your feet. Oh, as you hope for mercy above, do not sign the act that dismembers Poland!"

She was again on her knees, her beautiful eyes drowned in tears, and her hands clasped convulsively above her head.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the Empress, rising to her feet, "she does not believe me." Then bending tenderly over the Countess, she pressed her hands between her own, and gently raised her to a seat.

"Do you not see how deeply I suffer, when I have no spirit to chide your hard words to me! It is because I comprehend your sorrow, poor child, that I forgive your injustice! And now, to prove my sincerity," added she, going to her *escritoire* and taking from it a letter, "read this. I was about to send it to Prince Kaunitz, when your visit caused me to forget it. Read it aloud, that I may know whether you understand me at last."

The Countess unfolded the letter and read:

"When my own empire was threatened, and I knew not where to lay my head, when the sorrows of child-birth were overtaking me, I threw

* This discourse is historical. See Wolf, page 525. Raumer, vol. 4, page 540.

myself upon God and my just rights. But to-day, when humanity, justice, aye, reason itself, cry aloud against our acts, I confess to you that my anxiety transcends all that I have ever suffered in my life before. Tell me, Prince Kaunitz, have you thought of the evil example we are giving to the nations of earth, when, for the sake of a few acres of additional territory, we cast away our reputation, our dignity and our honor?"

"If I yield to-day, it is because I struggle alone, and no longer have the vigor of mind to contend for right, as in years gone by, I would have done. I am overpowered, but I surrender with a bleeding heart."*

The Countess remained looking at the paper, for a time, then she raised her tearful eyes to the face of the Empress. "I thank your Majesty," said she, deeply moved, "for allowing me to see this letter. It will remain in history as a noble monument of Maria Theresa's rectitude. I have no longer a word of blame for you, and once again in love and reverence, I kiss this hand, although I know that to-day it must sign the death-warrant of unhappy Poland."

She drew near, and raised the hand of the Empress to her lips. But Maria Theresa threw her arms around the Countess, exclaiming, "To my heart, dear, unhappy one! I cannot save Poland, but I can weep with her loveliest and noblest daughter!"

The Countess, overcome by this unexpected tenderness, leaned upon the bosom of the Empress, and wept. Maria Theresa stroked her lustrous black hair, and, as she kissed her marble cheek, the tears that had gathered in her eyes, fell upon the head of the Countess, where they glittered like stars upon the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FINIS POLONIAE.

NEITHER saw the door open, but both heard a soft, melodious voice, saying: "Pardon me, your Majesty, I thought you were alone."

The Countess uttered a low cry, and trembled from head to foot.

"Do not fear," said the Empress, as she gently withdrew her arms, "It is my son, the Emperor. We need not hide our tears from him, for he knows that this is not the first time his mother has wept for Poland."

The Emperor said nothing; he stood staring at the pale and trem-

* This letter was written by Maria Theresa's own hand. See Hornay's *Pocket-History of our native land*, 1631. Page 66.

bling Anna. He, too, grew deathly pale as he looked, and now his trembling limbs answered to the agitation that was overpowering her. Suddenly, as though awaking from a painful dream, he approached, and offering his hand, said,

"I rejoice to see you ; I have long sought you in vain."

She did not appear to see him : her arm hung listlessly at her side while her figure swayed to and fro like a storm-tossed lily.

"I have not been in Vienna," answered she, in a voice scarcely audible. "I had gone to bury my sorrow in solitude."

"But her love for Poland brought her hither," said the Empress, putting her arm affectionately around the Countess's waist.

"I believe you," returned Joseph, bitterly. "The fate of Poland is the only thing worthy of touching the Countess Wielopolska. She is not a woman, she is a Pole—nothing more."

One low wail struggled from the depths of her breaking heart, but she spoke not a word.

The Emperor went on : "The Countess Wielopolska is not a woman, she is a monad, representing patriotism, and he who cannot think as she does, is a criminal, unworthy of her regard."

"You are cruel, my son," said the Empress, deprecatingly. "If the Countess has been bitter in her reproaches to you, we must remember her grief, and her right to reproach us. We should be gentle with misfortune, above all when we can bring no relief."

"Let him go on, your Majesty," murmured the wretched Anna, while her eyes were raised, with a look of supreme agony, upon the stern face of the Emperor.

"Your Majesty is right. I am nothing but a Pole, and I will die with my fatherland. *Your* hands shall close our coffin-lids, for our fates will not cost you a tear. The dear, noble Empress has wept for us both, and the remembrance of her sympathy and of your cruelty, we will carry with us to the grave."

The Emperor's eyes flashed angrily, and he was about to retort, but he controlled himself and approached the Empress. "Your Majesty will pardon me if I interrupt your interesting conversation, but State affairs are peremptory, and supercede all other considerations. Your Majesty has commanded my presence that I might sign the act of partition. The courier, who is to convey the news to Berlin and St. Petersburg, is ready to go. Allow me to ask if your Majesty has signed."

The Countess, who understood perfectly that the Emperor in passing her by, to treat with his mother of this dreadful act of partition, wished to force her to retire, withdrew silently to the door. But the Empress, hurt that her son should have been so unfeeling, went forward and led her back to her seat.

"No, Countess, stay. The Emperor says that you represent Poland. Then let him justify his acts to us both, and prove that what he has done, is right. I have suffered such anguish of mind over the partition of Poland, that Joseph would lift a load from my heart, if he could

show me that it is inevitable. My son you have come for my signature; before God, your mother, and Poland herself, justify our deed, and I will sign the act."

"Justify! There are many things which we may defend without being able to justify them; and stern necessity often forces us to the use of measures which conscience disapproves."

"Prove to me, then, the necessity which has forced us to dismember a country whose people have never injured us," said the Empress, authoritatively.

—"But whose disunion at home has become dangerous to their neighbors. Poland lies, like a sick man, in our midst, whose dying breath infects the land. When there is a fire in our neighborhood, we are sometimes obliged to tear down the burning house lest the fire spread to our own."

"Yes!" interrupted the Countess, "but you do not rob the neighbor of his land. The soil belongs to him who owns the house."

—"But the Poles are not worthy to own their soil. What is Poland to-day? A race of slaves and peasants, without law or order, driven hither and thither by a lewd and corrupt aristocracy, who instead of blushing for the degeneracy of their caste, hold their saturnalia over the very graves of their noble ancestors! And at the head of this degenerate people is their King, the minion of a foreign court, who promulgates the laws which he receives from his imperial Russian mistress. Verily God has weighed the Polish nation in His balance, and they have been found wanting!"

"Enough!" faltered the Countess, raising her hand in deprecation.—"Why will you vilify a people who are in the throes of death?"

"No, it is not enough," said the Emperor, sternly. "The Empress says that I must justify the acts of the three Powers to Poland—that pale and beautiful statute before me, which lives and yet is not a woman. I say it again; a nation dies by its own corruption alone! Poland bears within herself the seeds of her destruction. Her people have been false to their antecedents, false to themselves, to their honor, and even to their faith."*

"You accuse, but you bring no proofs!" exclaimed the Countess, her eyes now flashing with wounded pride.

"Oh, it will not be difficult to collect my proofs," said the Emperor, sneering. "Look at what takes place in Poland, since your countrymen have forseen the fate of their fatherland. What are the Polish diet doing, since they anticipate the close of their sittings? Voting themselves pensions, property and every conceivable revenue at the expense of the Republic, and giving her, with their own parricidal hands, the *coup de grace*. Such shameless corruption has never come to light in the history of any other nation! Freedom and fatherland are in every mouth, but in reality, no people care less for either, than do the Poles. Slaves, who, while they hold out their hands to be manacled, are striving to

* Wolf, Austria under Maria Theresa, page 526.

reign over other slaves!"* This is a picture of the Poland whom you love; and through her own crimes, she is dying."

"It is not true!" cried the indignant Countess. "She dies through the covetousness and greed of her neighbors. It is they who have sown dissention in Poland, while forcing upon her unhappy people a King who is nothing but the despicable tool of their despicable intrigues."

"All this has no reference to Austria," objected the Emperor. "We had nothing to do with the selection of the King; nothing to do with the projects of dismemberment. They were resolved upon, with or without our sanction, and the law of self-preservation demands that if we cannot prevent, we must endeavor to profit by them. I know that the partition of Poland has an appearance of gross outrage which is obvious to every eye, while the stringent necessity which has driven Austria to participate in it, is known to few.—I confess that I would be grieved if the world should misjudge me on this question, for I try, both in public and private life, to be an honest man; and I believe that honesty in statesmanship is the wisest and soundest policy.† We could not do otherwise than we have done, and now with the full conviction of the exigency which has called for the act, I repeat my question to your Majesty, "Have you signed the act, or will you be so kind as to sign it now."

The Empress had listened with profound attention to her son's discourse, and her countenance, which before had been pale with anxiety, had assumed an expression of blended serenity and resolution. A pause ensued. Marble white and speechless, the Countess with half-open mouth started and bent forward, her eyes fixed upon the Empress; the Emperor, stern and proud, threw back his head and gazed defiant.

And in the midst of this throbbing silence, Maria Theresa went forward and took her seat at the *escritoire*. She dipped her pen in the silver inkstand, and a sob, that sounded like the last death-sigh, escaped from the lips of the Countess. The Empress turned quickly around; but the glance of her eye was resolute and her hand was firm.

She bent over the parchment and wrote; then throwing her pen on the floor she turned to the Emperor and pointed with her right hand to the deed. "*Placet*" cried she with her clear, ringing voice, "*placet*, since so many great and wise men will have it so. When I am dead, the world will learn what came of this violation of all that man holds sacred.‡

And either that she might conceal her own emotion, or avoid an outburst of grief from the Countess, the Empress walked hastily through the room, and shut herself up in her dressing-room.

The Countess moaned, and murmuring "*Finis Poloniae!*" she too attempted to cross the room.

The Emperor watched her, his eyes beaming with tenderness, his

* Raumer, Contributions, vol. 4, page 551

† The Emperor's own words. See Raumer, Contributions, &c. Vol. 1. page 539.

‡ The Empress's own words.

heart a prey to violent anguish. As she reached the door, he saw her reel and cling to a column for support.

With one bound he reached her, and flinging his arms around her swaying figure, she fell, almost unconscious, upon his bosom. She lay but for one bewildering moment there.

"*Finis Poloniae!*" murmured she again, and drawing herself up to her full height, she again approached the door.

"Farewell!" said she, softly.

The Emperor seized her hand. "Anna," said he imploringly, "Anna do we part thus?" "Is this our last interview? Shall we never meet again?"

She turned, and all the love that she had struggled to conquer, was in her eyes as they met his. "We will meet once more," replied she.

"When?" cried Joseph, frantic with grief.

"—When the hour has come for us to meet again, I will send for you. Promise to be there to receive my last farewell."

"I swear to be there."

"Then farewell."

"Farewell, beloved Anna! Oh let me touch your hand once more!"

"No!" said she harshly; and opening the door she disappeared and the Emperor was left alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FIERCE COUNTESS.

COUNT STARHEMBERG paced his splendid drawing-room in a state of great excitement. Sometimes he murmured broken sentences, then he sighed heavily, and again he seemed to be a prey to fear. Occasionally his eyes glanced almost reproachfully towards the figure of a young man who, with folded arms and smiling countenance, stood in the embrasure of a window watching the old man's agitation.

As the clock on the marble mantel struck the hour, the Count stopped before his young visitor, and looked searchingly at his mild and effeminate face.

"The half hour has elapsed, Count Esterhazy," said he solemnly. "I have told you frankly that my niece, although a beautiful and perchance a good-hearted woman, has a temper which is the terror of my household. She inherits this misfortune from her deceased father, and unhappily her lovely and amiable mother did not long survive him. There has been no one, therefore, to control her, and her terrible temper has

never been restrained. Do not say to me that *I* might have conquered it! I have dedicated my whole life to her; and lest she should make another being unhappy, I have remained a bachelor, as you perceive. But I had made a solemn promise to her parents that I would be a father to her, and I have kept my promise. It is not my fault if their child is less amiable than other women. She has an energetic character, and I fear that if she marries she will find means to tyrannise over her husband. I repeat this to you, Count, that we may clearly understand each other, and now that the half hour has gone by, do you still urge your suit?"

"Yes, Count, I do," replied Esterhazy in a soft, treble voice. "As her guardian I repeat to you the offer of my hand to the Countess Margaret Starhemberg."

The Count bowed. "I have done my duty, and being cleared of all responsibility in the affair, I give my consent. You must now try to win hers."

"I would like to see the Countess in your presence," said Esterhazy unmoved.

Count Starhemberg rang the bell, and ordered a servant to bear a request to his niece to join him in the drawing-room.

"The Countess would have the honor of joining her uncle immediately," was the answer.

"This promises well," said the old Count looking relieved. "She generally practises her music at this hour, and I am surprised that——"

Just then, the sharp tones of an angry female voice were heard without, then the jingling of glasses, then a crash, and the fall of some heavy metallic body.

"That is my niece," said the old man with a shiver. "That is the fanfare which usually announces her coming."

Now the door was flung violently open, and a tall, magnificent woman dashed into the room. Her features, marvellously chiselled as that of the antique Venus, would have been irresistible in beauty, if their expression had corresponded to their symmetry. But in her large black eyes glared the fire of ungoverned passion, and her rosy mouth was curled with contempt.

Her tall figure was of exquisite proportions, and her arms, adorned, but not hidden by the lace which fell from the short sleeves of her crimson velvet dress, were as fair and beautiful as those of the Venus of Milos.

Count Esterhazy, intoxicated by the sight of her wondrous beauty, withdrew abashed behind the window-curtain, while the Countess, graceful as an angry leopardess, bounded through the room, and stood before her uncle.

"Who has annoyed you, my child?" asked he timidly.

"He is an idiot, an awkward animal, and shall be driven from the house with the lash!" cried she. "Just imagine, uncle, that as I was coming hither, I met him in the ante-room with a plateau of cups and glasses.

When he saw me, the fool fell to trembling as if he had seen an evil spirit—the plateau shook, and my dear mother's last gift, the goblet from which she had cooled her dying lips, fell to the floor, and was broken."

Her voice at first so loud and angry, was now soft and pathetic and her eyes glistened with tears. She shook them off impatiently.

"I can well understand, dear child, how much it must have grieved you to lose this precious relic," said her uncle soothingly.

She blushed as though she had been surprised in a fault.

"Oh, it was not that," said she pettishly, "it is all the same to me whether the goblet was a relic or not, for I hate sentiment.

But I detest such an awkward fool. He never *could* carry anything without letting it fall."

—"Nay, my child, he has often carried you for hours in his arms, and yet he never let you fall."

"Uncle, your jests are insupportable," cried she, stamping with her little satin-slipped foot upon the carpet. You excuse this gray-headed dunce merely to vex me, and to remind me that I am an orphan without a home."

—"But my dear ——"

"Peace! I will not be interrupted. If I am tyrannised over in every other way, I will at least claim the right to speak—I wish to say that this old plague shall not remain here another day to torment my life with his nonsense——"

This time, however, I made him feel the weight of my hand. His face was as red as my dress after it."

"You struck my faithful old Isidor?" cried the Count, shocked.

"Yes I did," replied she, looking defiantly into her uncle's mild face. "I beat him well, and then I threw the whole waiter of cups and glasses upon the floor. Have you any fault to find with that, my sympathising uncle?"

"None, none," said the old man. "If it gave you pleasure to break the glasses, we will go out and buy others."

—"We! No, indeed, we shall not. Isidor shall pay for them from his wages. It was his fault that I was obliged to break them, and no one shall suffer for it except himself. I claim that, as an act of bare justice to myself."

—"But my dear Countess——"

She stamped her foot again. "Great God, have you no object in life except that of contradicting and ill-treating me!"

The Count sighed and approached the door. She heard him, and an exulting smile lit up her beautiful stormy face.

"Well, as you will not tell him, I shall do it myself. Yes—I shall do it myself. Do you hear, uncle? You shall not say a word to him."

—"I will say nothing, Margaret. Will you now allow me to speak of other things? In your vehemence ——"

UNCLE!

“In your just displeasure, you have overlooked the fact that we are not alone.”

He pointed to the window where, half-hidden by the heavy silk drape, stood Count Frank Esterhazy. The Countess followed her uncle's glance, and as she became aware of the visitor's presence, burst into a merry laugh.

“Do not be frightened, young man,” said she then; “you may come out from your corner. I am not a cat, and I don't devour mice. Ah you have heard our discussion? What a pity you are not a dramatic poet, you have had such an opportunity for depicting a foolish old guardian and his spirited ward!”

“Unfortunately I am not a poet,” said the young Count coming forward and bowing to the floor. “If I were, I could write to-day a hundred sonnets to the eyes of the majestic Hera, whose anger heightens her wonderful beauty.”

“Uncle,” said the Countess, suddenly assuming a stately and court-like demeanor, “be so good as to present me this young stranger, who pays such insipid compliments.”

—“My dear niece, let me introduce Count Frank Esterhazy, a nobleman just returned from Italy, who is in high favor with the Empress.”

“The latter is no recommendation, uncle, for am I not also a favorite with the Empress? Have you not often told me so when the Empress was humbling me with some of her tyrannical condescension?”

—“Certainly, my child, I have said so.”

“Then you see that it is not necessary to be estimable for one to gain the Empress's good-will. For my part, I wish she loved me less, for then she would spare me some of the long sermons with which she edifies me, when I happen to appear at court.”

“That probably is the reason you appear so seldom,” asked Count Esterhazy. “I heard your absence complained of.”

“By her Majesty?” asked Count Starhemberg.

“No, your Excellency, by the Emperor.”

“What did he say?”

“Dare I repeat his word?” asked Esterhazy, appealing to the Countess. She bowed her head, and leaned against the back of an arm-chair.

“I was yesterday at the Empress's reception. The Emperor was so kind as to do the honors of the Court to me. He pointed out the several beauties of Vienna, who were all strangers to me—‘But,’ said he, ‘the most beautiful woman in Austria I cannot show you, for she is not here. The Countess Margaret Von Starhemberg has the beauty of Juno and Venus united.’”

The Countess said nothing; she stood with downcast eyes. Her cheek had paled, and her lips were firmly compressed together. Suddenly she rallied and said with a careless laugh,

“I wager that the Empress and her ladies made some amiable commentary on the Emperor's words. Come, tell me what said the Empress?”

"If you command me—Countess, I will tell you. The Empress added with a sigh, 'It is true, she is as beautiful as a Goddess, but it is Eris whom she resembles.'"

"Very witty!" exclaimed the Countess with a sneer.

"And the Emperor?" inquired the uncle.

"The Emperor frowned at the ladies who began to laugh. 'Your Majesty may be right,' said he, 'but Grecian Mythology has forgotten to say whether the fierce Goddess was ever vanquished by Love. Love tames the most turbulent of women.'"

The Countess uttered a sharp cry, and caught with both her hands at the back of the arm-chair. Her eyes closed, and a deadly paleness overspread her countenance. Her uncle hastened to put his arm around her, inquiring tenderly, "Dearest child, what ails you?"

She leaned for a while upon his shoulder; then raising her head while deep blushes crimsoned her cheeks, she said haughtily, "It is nothing. A sudden faintness to which I am subject." With an inclination of the head to Count Esterhazy, she continued,

"You will be so good as not to mention this weakness of mine. It is purely physical, and I hope to conquer it in time. I am rejoiced to think that I have verified the words of the Empress and have appeared before you to-day as an Eris. I suppose you came hither to see me out of curiosity."

"No, Countess Margaret, the purport of my visit was anything but curiosity. I come with the sanction of your guardian to offer you my hand."

The black eyes of the Countess darted fire at the smiling suitor.

"You do not answer me," said he blandly. "I say that I have won the consent of your uncle, and respectfully solicit yours. It shall be the study of my life to make you happy; and perhaps at some future day my untiring devotion may win a return of my love. Speak then, Countess, say that you will be my wife."

"Never, never," cried she, stretching forth her arms as though to ward away some threatening evil. "I shall never be the wife of any man. I was not made for marriage, I will not bow my will before that of any other fellow-mortal."

"I shall not require you to do so," replied the Count as though he had now removed every objection. "You will be in my house as you are here, absolute mistress of all things, and I shall claim nothing but the right of being your humblest and most devoted servant."

"Unhappily for you, you know not what you claim," exclaimed the Countess angrily. "Ask my uncle, ask his household, and they will tell you that I am a tyrant, changing my will twenty times an hour; hating to-day the thing I shall love to-morrow. Oh, you would aspire to be my husband, would you? Have you no friends to warn you of the reefs upon which you are running that poor little crazy bark of yours? Why the very people, as they see me pass, tell of my frantic doings; and every child in Vienna knows that I beat my servants, rage about

my uncle's house like the foul fiend, and dash through the streets on horseback like the Wild Huntsman."

"'Love tames the wildest hearts,' so says the Emperor."

Margaret started, and darted a fiery glance at his tranquil face.

"But I do not love you, I tell you; and it is useless to say another word on the subject."

"Nay," said the Count, taking her hand, "it is not useless. I beseech you, do not deny my suit."

At this moment the door opened, and a servant came in with a golden tray, on which lay a letter.

"From her Majesty, the Empress," said the servant, handing it to Count Starhemberg. The Count took the letter and went into the embrasure of the window, while the servant retired noiselessly.

"Countess Margaret," said Count Esterhazy, in an imploring voice, "once more I entreat you to accept me as your husband."

She looked at him with withering contempt. "Have I not told you," cried she, passionately, "that I do not love you? A man of honor ceases to importune a woman after such an avowal."

"A man of spirit never gives up; he perseveres in the hope that, sooner or later, he will reach his goal. No man has the right to expect that he will obtain a treasure without trouble."

"Cant! miserable cant!" And the great, glowing eyes that were looking with such scorn at the slight figure of the Count, encountered their own image in the glass before which they both stood.

"Look!" cried she, pointing to the mirror, "yonder reflection gives its answer to your suit. Do you see that tall woman, whose head towers above the blond mannikin who stands beside her? Look at her black hair, her fiery eyes and resolute bearing! And now look at the little fair-haired puppet, who resembles a man about as much as do the statuettes on my toilet-table. Ah, sir Count, if you were the woman and I the man, there might be marriage between us! But as it is, you would die of my violence, or I of your insipidity. So, excuse me."

She made a deep curtsy, and turned to leave the room. But she felt a touch upon her shoulder, and looking back she saw her uncle gazing at her with a face of great anxiety.

"My child," said he, in a faltering voice, "do not send Count Esterhazy so rudely away. He is rich, noble and distinguished, and in every way worthy of my lovely niece. Do not refuse him, Margaret."

"The Count has recovered from his stupid delusion, uncle; I have told him how impossible it is for me to accept his hand."

"But my poor child you must try to love him. You dare not reject his offer."

"What! I dare not reject whom I please!" cried she, in a voice shrill with passion.

"No, you dare not. The Empress commands you to accept the hand of Count Esterhazy. Here is the note I have at this moment received from her Majesty."

Margaret tore the paper savagely from her uncle's hand. With staring eyes she read its contents, while her whole body trembled violently, and her lips were bloody with the efforts she was making to suppress a scream.

At last she gave it back. "Read it," said she, hoarsely, "the letters swim before my eyes."

The Count took the note and read :

"DEAR COUNT STARHEMBERG:—It is my desire that your niece, the Countess Margaret, shall become the wife of some honorable man. In this way she may hope to conquer her ungovernable temper, and become a reasonable woman. I have heard that Count Esterhazy intends to become her suitor, and I command her to accept his hand. She has led a life of wild independence, and it is time she were tamed by the cares, duties and responsibilities of matrimony. I am both her Empress and god-mother, and I use my double right for her good. The marriage shall take place in one week, or she goes into a convent. That is my ultimatum.

I remain, yours with sentiments of esteem,
 MARIA THERESA."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BETROTHAL.

A LONG pause ensued after the reading of the letter. The Countess stood with her eyes riveted upon her uncle's face, as though she were waiting for something more. The young Count watched her furtively, but he looked determined.

"You see, my child," at last sighed the old Count, "it is inevitable. The Empress must be obeyed."

"No! no!" screamed the wretched girl, awaking from her stupor, "I will not be the wife of that man."

"Then you will have to go into a convent."

"No!" cried she, her face suddenly lighting up with a flash of hope, "no, I will do neither. There is a means of rescuing me from both."

She turned, with a bewitching smile, to Count Esterhazy, and in a voice whose softness was music to his ear, she addressed him,

"In your hands lies the power to rescue me from a forced bridal. You have heard that despotic note from the Empress. Match-making is a monomania with Maria Theresa, it is useless, therefore, for me to appeal to her; for on a question of marriage, she is inexorable. But you, Count Esterhazy," continued she, in tones of caressing melody, "you

will rescue me, will you not? I cannot be your wife, for I do not love you; I cannot go into a convent, for I have no piety. Go, then, to the Empress and tell her that you do not wish to marry me. You, at least, are free. Refuse to accept me for your wife, and this miserable comedy is at an end."

She had clasped her little white hands and was looking imploringly in his face.

The young man shook his head. "I cannot say this to the Empress," said he, quietly, "for it is she who sent me hither to woe you."

"The Empress sent you hither!" cried the Countess, springing forward like a lioness. "You came not to me as a free suitor, but as the obedient slave of the Empress!"

"Yes, I came at the command of the Empress," said the young man, mildly.

The Countess burst into a loud laugh. "That, then, was the glowing love which you were describing just now; that, your tender wish to live for my happiness alone! Obedient school-boy! You were told to come and ask for my hand, and you came for fear of being whipped!—Oh, why am I not a man! By the eternal Lord, no woman should inflict upon me such contumely!"

"It is true," said Count Esterhazy, taking no note of her words, "that the Empress ordered me hither. But since I have seen you, I need no prompting save that of my own heart."

"Peace, fool, nobody believes you! You had consented to woe me in obedience to your despotic Sovereign. But you have seen me, now you know with how much justice I am called the 'The fierce Countess,' and now surely you have manhood enough to reject a termagant like me. Go, then, and tell the Empress that I was willing, but you were not——"

"I would not thus belie you, lovely Margaret."

"What do I care whether you belie me or not, so that I am rid of you," said she, contemptuously.

"Submit, my dear child," said the old Count, with tears in his eyes. "Tis the first time in your life that you have been thwarted, and therefore, it is hard for you to succumb."

"I will not submit!" cried Margaret, flinging back her head. "I will not marry this man! Uncle, dear uncle, leave me one moment with him. I have something to say that he alone must hear."

The Count withdrew at once into another room.

"Now, sir, that we are alone, I have a secret to reveal, to God and to yourself. Swear by the memory of your mother that you will not betray me."

"I swear."

"She bowed her head as though accepting the oath. "And, now," said she, faltering and blushing, "I will tell you why I can never be your wife. I"—she hesitated and her head sank upon her bosom, while she stifled a sigh. "I love another," whispered she, almost inar-

ticulately. "Yes—I love another. I love him with every throb of my heart, with all the strength of my being. My every breath is a prayer for him; every wish, hope, and longing of my soul points to him alone. I would die to give him one hour of joy. Now, that I have made this avowal, you retract your suit, do you not? You will go now to the Empress and say that you will not accept me for your wife. You give me my freedom, surely you give it to me now?"

Count Esterhazy smiled compassionately. "This is a fable, Countess, which you have invented to escape me. A few moments ago you said that you would never love."

"I said that to disincline you to marry me."

"I do not believe you," said Esterhazy, calmly. "You have invented this story of your love for that end; but it is a falsehood, for you are as cold as an icicle."

"Oh, I wish that I were! For this love is my greatest misfortune. Look at me, Count. Does this look like dissimulation?"

And she raised up to his view, a face scarlet with blushes, and eyes filled with burning tears:

"No, Countess," said Esterhazy, after contemplating her earnestly, "I will believe the tears that glisten in your speaking eyes. But now, answer me one question. Your confidence gives me the right to ask it. Is your love returned?"

She remained silent, as if communing with herself, while every trace of color vanished from her cheeks.

"No," said she, at last, with quivering lips. "No, he does not know it; and if he did, he could not offer me his hand."

"Then," replied Esterhazy, coolly, "your love is no impediment to our marriage. Cherish it if you choose; raise altars to this unknown god, and deck them with the brightest flowers of devotion. I will not inquire the name of your deity. Your secret is safe, even from myself. I, on the contrary, have never loved. My heart stands with doors and windows open, ready to receive its mistress, and as the Empress has selected you, it waits joyfully for you to take possession."

The Countess laid her hand upon his arm, and grasped it like a vice. "You will not recede," said she, hoarsely. "You still persist in desiring me for your wife?"

"You have told me that your love is hopeless, therefore is mine hopeful. Perhaps, one day, it may succeed in winning yours."

"But you do not love me!" shrieked the maddened girl. "You are here by command of the Empress."

"And the Esterhazys have always been the loyal servants of the Empress. Whatever she commands they obey, were it at the cost of life and happiness. Allow me, then, to persevere in my obedience, not only to her desires, but to my own. I once more solicit the honor of your hand."

"Woe to you, if after this, I yield!" cried she, with threatening gesture. "I have stooped to entreat you, and my prayers have been vain."

I have withdrawn the womanly veil that concealed my heart's cherished secret, and you have not renounced your unmanly suit. I said that I did not love you. Look at me, and hear me while I vow eternal hatred should I be forced to give you my hand!"

"There is but one step from hate to love. Allow me to hope that you will think better of it, and take that step."

A fearful cry rang from her lips, her eyes glowed like burning coals, and she raised her clenched hand as though she had hoped it might fell him to the earth. But suddenly it sank helpless to her side, and she looked long and searchingly into Count Esterhazy's face.

A long silence ensued. "It is well," said she, at length, in clear, shrill tones. "You have challenged me to mortal combat, and it may be that you will win. But, oh! believe me when I tell you that victory will bring you no glory. Your strength is not your own; it lies in the imperial hand of Maria Theresa. I swear to you that if I become your wife, my whole life shall be consecrated to hatred and revenge. Count Esterhazy, I hold my word inviolate, whether I pledge it to friend or foe; and when the blight shall fall upon your head that will grow out of this hour we have spent together, remember that had you been a man of honor you might have spared yourself the shame!"

Without another word she lifted her proud head, and, with a look of withering scorn, left the room.

Count Esterhazy's eyes followed her retreating figure and his placid brow grew troubled. "Beautiful as she is," murmured he, "it is dangerous to woo her. She has the beauty of Medusa. My heart positively seems to petrify under her glance. I would be more than willing to renounce the honor of wedding this beautiful demon, but I dare not refuse."

And he drew out his delicate, embroidered handkerchief to wipe off the big drops of sweat that stood upon his forehead.

"Well?" asked Count Starhemberg, opening the door and putting through his head.

"Pray come in," said Esterhazy, in a piteous tone.

"Ah, my niece has left! Well, I suppose that, as usual, she has conquered, and you release her?"

"Not at all," replied the unhappy mannikin, "I still beg for the honor of her hand. The Empress has spoken and I have only to obey."

CHAPTER XXXV.

FRANZ ANTONY MESMER.

For some weeks, great excitement had existed in Vienna. In all assemblies, *cafés*, houses and *restaurants*, in the streets and on the public places, the topic of conversation had been the wonderful cures of the Suabean physician, Mesmer. These cures contravened all past experience, and set at naught all reason. Mesmer made no use of decoction or electuary, he prescribed neither baths nor cataplasms; he cured his patients by the power of his hand and the glance of his large, dark eye. He breathed upon their foreheads, and forthwith they saw visions of far off lands; he passed the tips of his fingers over their faces, and pain and suffering vanished at his touch. No wonder that physicians denounced him as a charlatan, and apothecaries reviled him as an imposter.

No wonder that the populace, so prone to believe the marvellous, had faith in Mesmer, and revered him as a saint. Why should he not perform miracles with his hand, as did Moses with a rod, when he struck the rock? Why should not the power of his eye master disease, as once the glance of the Apostles gave speech to the dumb and awakened life in the dead?

Mesmer, too, was an apostle—the apostle of a new faith. He bade suffering humanity turn to heaven for relief. ‘The reflection from the planets’, said he, ‘and the rays of the sun, exercised over the human system, a magnetic power. The great remedy for disease lay in this magnetic power, which resides in iron and steel, and which has its highest and most mysterious development in man.’

The people believed; and sought his healing hand. He mastered their infirmities, and soothed their sufferings. But the more the world honored and trusted him, the more bitter grew the hatred of the faculty. Each day brought him fresh blessings and fresh imprecations. The physicians, who in Salzburg, had hurled Paracelsus from a rock, dared not attempt the life of Mesmer; but they persecuted him as an imposter, and proved, by learned and scientific deduction, that his system was a lying absurdity.

Those, who affected strength of mind, and refused to believe anything except that which could be demonstrated by process of reasoning, gave in their adherence to the indignant physicians. Those, on the contrary, who had faith in the mysteries of religion, were disciples of Mesmer; and they revered him as a prophet, sent from heaven, to prove the supremacy of nature over knowledge.

Mesmer's fame had reached the Court, and the Empress, herself, became interested in his extraordinary achievements. In vain Van Swieten and Stork besought her to silence the audacious quack, who was ruining a great profession. She shook her head, and would have nothing to do with the feud.

"I shall wait and see," said she. His system is harmless, and I shall not fetter him. One thing is certain. His manipulations will never poison anybody, as many a regular physician's prescription has done, and he shall not be molested. He has voluntarily sought an ordeal which will determine his position before the world. If he cures the blindness of my little *protégé*, Therese, I shall give in my adherence with the rest; for he who restores the blind to sight, holds his skill from above."

This young girl was known to all Vienna. In her second year, after an attack of suppressed measles, she had become blind, and all attempts to restore her sight, had proved unavailing. But if sight had been denied to her eyes, her soul was lit up by the inspiration of art. When Therese sat before the harpsichord and her dexterous fingers wandered over its keys—when, with undisturbed serenity, she executed the most difficult music that could be written for the instrument, no one who saw her beautiful eyes could have surmised their inutility. Her features were expressive, and those sightless eyes, seemed at times, to brighten with joy, or to grow dim with sorrow. Nevertheless, Therese Von Paradies was wholly blind; her eyes were merely the portals of her soul—they sent forth light, but received none in return.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERESE VON PARADIES.

THERESE VON PARADIES was in her room; her mother stood near, for with the assistance of a maid, she had just completed her daughter's toilet. Therese was elegantly dressed, and she seemed to enjoy her splendor although she was not permitted to see it.

"Say, mother," said she, as the last touch had been given to her dress, "of what material is my gown? It feels as soft as a young girl's cheek."

"It is satin, my child."

"Satin? And the color?"

"White."

"White!" repeated she, softly. "The color without color. How

strange that must be. I shudder when I think that I shall see it before long."

"Why should you shudder?" said her mother, tenderly. "You should rejoice, dear child, that the world, with all its beauties, is about to become known to you."

"I do not know," replied Therese, thoughtfully. "I shall enter upon a new world which will astonish, and perchance, affright me by its strangeness. Now I know you all in my heart, but when I see you, I shall no longer recognize you. Oh, mother, why do you wish me to be restored to sight? I am very happy as I am."

"Silly child, you will be still happier when you see. It is absurd for you to dread an event which will add a hundred-fold to your enjoyment of life."

"And why absurd, dear mother? Does not the heart of the bride, on her wedding day, beat half in hope and half in fear? And is not her soul filled with sweet apprehension? I am a bride—the bride of light, and I await my lover to-day."

"Ah, who knows if light will come," sighed the mother.

"It will come, mother," said Therese, confidently. "I felt it yesterday, when, for a moment, Mesmer removed the bandage from my eyes. It was for a second, but I saw, and what I saw cut like a sharp sword athwart my eyes, and I fell, almost unconscious."

"That was a ray of light—the first glance of your bride-groom!" cried the mother, joyfully.

"Then I fear that I shall never be able to bear his presence," replied Therese, sadly. "But tell me, mother, am I dressed as becomes a bride?"

"Yes, Therese, you are beautifully dressed, for to-day we receive a throng of distinguished guests. Even the Empress has sent one of her lords in waiting, to bear her the tidings of your restoration to sight.—The two great doctors, Van Swieten and Stork, will be here to see the marvel; and princes and princesses, lords and ladies, ministers and generals, will be around you."

"How is my hair dressed?"

"It is dressed as you like it, *à la Matignon*. Pepi has built a tower upon your head at least three quarters of an ell high, and above that is a blue rosette, with long ends."

"It is indeed very high," replied Therese, laughing, "for I cannot reach it with my hands. But I have another question to ask, dear mother. Promise me that it shall be frankly answered."

"I promise."

"Well, then, tell me, is my appearance pleasing? Hitherto every one has been kind to me because of my misfortune; but when I stand upon equal footing with other women, do you think that I am pretty enough to give pleasure to my friends?"

"Yes, my dear, you are very handsome," said the mother, smiling lovingly at her child's simplicity. "Your figure is graceful, your face

is oval, your features are regular, and your brow is high and thoughtful. When the light of day shall be reflected from your large, dark eyes, you will be a beautiful woman, my daughter."

"Thank you, dear mother, these are pleasant tidings," said Therese, kissing her.

"I must leave you, dearest," said her mother, softly, disengaging herself from Therese's arms; "I have my own toilet to make, and some preparations for our guests. I will send the maid."

"No, dear mother, send no one. I need silence and solitude. I, too, have preparations to make for the heavenly guest that visits me to-day. I must strengthen my soul by prayer."

She accompanied her mother to the door, kissed her again and returning seated herself at the harpsichord. And now from its keys came forth sounds of mirth and melancholy, of love and complaint, of prayers and tears. At one time she intoned a hymn of joy, then came stealing over the air a melody that brought tears to the eyes of the musician; then it changed and swelled into a torrent of gushing harmony.

Suddenly she paused, a tremor ran through her frame, and a blush slowly mantled her cheek. Her hands fell, and her bosom heaved. As if drawn by some invisible power, she rose from her instrument and went towards the door. In the centre of the room she stopped and pressed her hands upon her heart.

"He comes," murmured she, with a smile of ecstasy, "he mounts the stair-case, now he is in the corridor, his hand is upon the door."

Yes, the door opened so softly that the acutest ear could not have detected a sound. But Therese felt it, and she would have gone forward, but her feet were paralysed, and she remained with outstretched arms. With her heart she had seen him who now appeared upon the threshold. The person, whose coming had so agitated the young girl, was a man of scarcely forty years, of a lofty, imposing carriage, and of prepossessing features. His large, blue eyes, rested upon Therese with a glance of power, which thrilled through every fibre of her being. He held out his right arm towards her; then slowly lowering it, he pointed to the floor. Therese followed its motion and sank on her knees. A triumphant smile beamed over Mesmer's face, and he raised his hand again. The girl arose, and as though she had seen him open his arms, she darted forward and laid her head upon his breast.

"Mesmer, my friend, my physician," whispered she, softly.

"Yes, it is I," replied Mesmer, in a rich, melodious voice. "Your heart has seen me, your eyes shall see me, too, my child."

He led her to a sofa and seated her gently beside him. Then passing his outstretched hand before her, she trembled.

"You are very much excited to-day, Therese," said he, with a slight tone of disapprobation.

"I am excited because you are so, dear friend," said the blind girl.—
"Your eyes dart beams that threaten to consume the world."

"A world of ignorance and of wickedness," said he, in reply. "Yes,

Therese, I will consume it to-day, and in its stead shall arise a supernatural world; yet one to which banished nature shall return and claim her rights to man. Oh, will I have strength to say, 'Let there be light!'"

—"Dear friend, if you doubt of the result, do not expose yourself to the humiliation of failure. I am satisfied with my blindness, for I have a world of light in my heart."

"No!" cried Mesmer, with energy, "the work is begun, it must be completed. You *must* see Therese, or all for which I have striven will recoil upon my head, and bury me beneath its ruins. This day decides not only your fate, poor child, but mine. To-day must Mesmer prove to the world that the animal magnetism, which physicians deride as quackery, *savans* deny as impracticable, and the people ignorantly worship as sorcery, is a golden link which binds humanity to heaven. To-day you shall be healed by the magnetic power which binds you to me, and links us both to God."

"Heal me, then, dear master!" cried the girl, inspired by his enthusiasm; "restore me to sight, and in so doing give light to those who cannot see your God-like gift."

He laid his hand upon her shoulder, and gazed earnestly in her face. "You have faith in me then, Therese, have you not?"

"I believe in you and I comprehend you, master. I know that I shall see; and when the scales fall from my eyes, the light of conviction will dawn for others. They will then comprehend that there is a power in Nature stronger than the craft of bare human wisdom."

"Oh, you speak my very thoughts, dear Therese," said Mesmer, tenderly. "You see into my mind, and its perceptions find birth upon your lips. Let doctors sneer, and learned skeptics disbelieve, but the day will come when all must acknowledge that magnetism is truth, and all human wisdom, lies. Physicians, though, will be its deadliest enemies, for they are travellers, who having strayed from the right path, go farther and farther from truth, because they will not retrace their steps."*

"But you will show them the path, my master, and the world will honor you above other men."

"If ingratitude do not blind it to truth. It is hard to find day-light in the labyrinth of established faith. I, too, have wandered in this labyrinth, but in all my divarications, I sought for truth. With passionate longing, I called her to my help. Far removed from the hum of human imbecility, down among the solitudes of untrodden forests, I sought her. Here I was face to face with Nature, and listened for response to the anxious questionings of my restless heart. It was well for me that the trees were the only witnesses of my agitation, for my fellow-men, had they met, would have chained me as a madman."

"Not I, master. I would have understood your noble strife."

Mesmer pressed her hand and went on: "Every occupation became distasteful to me, every moment dedicated to aught else seemed to be

* Mesmer's own words. See Franz Anton Mesmer, of Suabia, by Dr. Justinus Kerner. page 56.

reason to truth. I regretted the time which it cost me to translate my thoughts into words, and I formed the singular resolution of keeping silence. For three months I reflected without speaking a word. At the end of this time a new faculty unfolded itself in my mind, and I began to see with rapture that the day of truth had dawned. I knew that henceforth my life would be one long struggle against preconceived error; but this did not affright me. So much the more did I feel the obligation resting upon me to impart to my fellow beings the gifts I had received. I have suffered much from their prejudices, but most from the sneers of envious physicians, who sooner than receive a light from other hands, would stumble in the night of their ignorance forever.* But my day of triumph is here. You, Therese, are the Evangelist of my new Faith, and your restored vision shall announce it to the world!"

"It shall, dear master, it shall; and against their will these infidels shall believe. They will see that we have all been blind together—all but you, who, questioning in faith, have received your answer from on high. Take the bandage from my eyes and let me see the light of day! I tremble no longer with apprehension of its splendor!"

Mesmer held her back as she raised her hands to her head. "Not yet, Therese. Your bandage must be removed in the presence of my enemies."

"Whom do you expect, master?"

"I have told you.—I expect my enemies. Professor Barth will be here to sneer at the charlatan who, by an invisible power, has healed the malady which his couching knife would have sought in vain to remove. Doctor Ingenhaus, my bitter rival, will be there, to find out by what infernal magic the charlatan has cured hundreds of patients pronounced by him incurable; Father Hell will be there, to see if the presence of a great astronomer will not affright the charlatan. Oh, yes!—and others will be there—none seeking knowledge, but all hoping to see me discomfited."

"Do not call yourself so often by that unworthy name," said Therese sorrowfully.

"Men call me so; I may as well accept the title."

"Perhaps they have called you so in days gone by; but from this day they will call you 'Master,' and will crave your pardon for the obsequy they have heaped upon your noble head."

"How little you know of the world, Therese! It never pardons those who convict it of error, and above all other hatred is the hatred that mankind feel for their benefactors."

"Gracious heaven, master, if this is the world which is to open to my view, in mercy leave me to my blindness!"

She stopped suddenly, and sank back upon the cushion of the sofa. Mesmer raised his hands and passed them before her forehead.

"You are too much excited. Sleep!"

"No, no, I do not wish to sleep," murmured she.

* This whole conversation is in Mesmer's words. See *Principles of Mesmerism*, page 60.

"I command you to sleep," repeated Mesmer.

Therese heaved a sigh; her head fell farther back, and her audible, regular breathing soon proved that sleep had come at the bidding of her master.

Mesmer bent over her, and began his manipulations. He approached her lips, and opening her mouth, breathed into it. She smiled a happy smile. He then raised his hands and touching the crown of her head described half-circles in the air: then stooping over her, he again inhaled her breath, and breathed his own into her mouth.

The door opened and the mother of Therese came in.

"The guests are here," said she.

Mesmer inclined his head. "We are ready."

"Ready, and Therese sleeps so soundly!"

"I will awake her when it is time. Where is my harmonicon?"

"In the parlor where you ordered it to be placed."

"Let us go, then, and from thence we will call Therese."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FIRST DAY OF LIGHT.

THE élite of Vienna were assembled in the drawing-room of Herr Von Paradies. The aristocratic, the scientific and the artistic world were represented; and the Empress, as before intimated, had sent her messenger to take notes of the extraordinary experiment which was that day to be tried upon the person of her young pensioner. At the request of Mesmer some of the lower classes were there also, for it was his desire that the cottage as well as the palace should bear testimony to the triumph of animal magnetism over the prejudices of conventional science.

By order of Mesmer, the room had been darkened, and heavy green curtains hung before every window. Seats were arranged around the room, in the centre of which was a space occupied by a couch, some chairs, and a table on which lay a box.

Upon this box the eyes of the spectators were riveted, and Professor Barth himself, in spite of his arrogant bearing, felt quite as much curiosity as his neighbors, to see its contents.

"You will see, Herr Kollege," said he to one who sat beside him, "you will see that he merely wishes to collect this brilliant assemblage in order to perform an operation in their presence, and so make a name for himself. This box of course contains the instruments. Wait and

watch for the lancet that is sure to make its appearance first or last."

"What will be the use of his lancet," replied Herr Kollege, "when there is nothing upon which it can operate? The girl is irretrievably blind, for neither knife nor lancet can restore life to the deadened optical nerve."

"If he attempts to use the lancet in *my* presence," said the Professor in a threatening tone, "I will prevent him. I shall watch him closely, and woe to the imposter if I surprise him at a trick!"

"The box does not contain surgical instruments," whispered the Astronomer, Hell. "I know what he has in there."

"What?" asked the others eagerly.

"A planet, my friends. You know he is given to meddling with planets. I hope it is one unknown to science, for if he has carried off any of *my* stars, I shall have him arrested for robbery."

This sally caused much laughter, which was interrupted by the entrance of Mesmer with Frau Von Paradies. Without seeming to observe the spectators who now thronged the room, Mesmer advanced to the table where lay the box. His face was pale, but perfectly resolute, and as his eyes were raised to meet those of the guests, each one felt that whatever might be the result, in the soul of the operator there was neither doubt nor fear.

Mesmer opened the box. A breathless silence greeted this act. Every whisper was hushed, every straining glance was fixed upon that mysterious coffer. He seated himself before it, and Professor Barthe whispered, "Now he is about to take out his instruments."

But he was interrupted by the sound of music—music so exquisite that the heart of the learned Professor himself responded to its pathos. It swelled and swelled until it penetrated the room and filled all space with its thrilling notes. All present felt its power, and every eye was fixed upon the enchanter, who was swaying a multitude as though their emotions had been his slaves, and his music the voice that bade them live or die!

"Ah!" whispered the Astronomer, "you made a mistake of a part of speech. The man has not instruments, but *an* instrument."

"True," replied the Professor, "and your planet turns out to be an insignificant harmonicon."

"And the lancet," added Ingerhaus, "is a cork, with a whalebone handle."

Mesmer played on, and now his music seemed an entreaty to some invisible spirit to appear and reveal itself to mortal eyes. At least, so it seemed to his listeners. They started—for responsive to the call, a tall white figure, whose feet seemed scarcely to touch the floor, glided in and stood for a moment irresolute. Mesmer raised his hand and stretching it out towards her, she moved. Still he played on, and nearer and nearer she came, while the music grew louder and more irresistible in its pleadings.

A movement was perceptible among the spectators. Several ladies

had fainted; their nerves had given way before the might of that wonderful music.* But no one felt disposed to move to assist them, for all were absorbed by the spell, and each one gazed in speechless expectation upon Mesmer and Therese.

He still played on, but he threw up his head, and his large eyes were directed towards his patient with a look of authority. She felt the glance and trembled. Then she hastened her steps, and smilingly advanced until she stood close beside the table. He pointed to the couch, and she immediately turned towards it and sat down.

"This is well gotten up," said Professor Barthe. "The scene must have been rehearsed more than once."

"If the blind are to be restored to sight by harmonicons," whispered Doctor Ingenhaus, "I shall throw my books to the winds and become an itinerant musician."

"If planets are to be brought down by a wave of the hand," said Hell, "I will break all my telescopes, and offer my services to Mesmer as an amanuensis."

The harmonicon ceased, and the censorious professors too, were forced to cease their cavilling.

Mesmer arose, and approaching Therese, made a few passes above her head.

"My eyes burn as if they were pierced with red-hot daggers," said she, with an expression of great suffering.

He now directed the tips of his fingers towards her eyes, and touched the bandage.

"Remove the bandage and see!" cried he in a loud voice.

Therese tore it off, and pale as death, she gazed with wonder at the 'Master,' who stood directly in front of her. Pointing to him, she said with an expression of fear and dislike,

"Is that a man which stands before me?"†

Mesmer bowed his head. Therese started back, exclaiming, "It is fearful! But where is Mesmer? Show me Mesmer!"

"I am he," said Mesmer, approaching her.

She drew back and looked at him with a scrutinizing expression. "I had supposed that the human face was radiant with joy," said she, "but this one looks like incarnate woe. Are all mankind sad? Where is my mother?"

Frau Von Paradies was awaiting her daughter's call; she now came forward, her face beaming with love and joy. But Therese, instead of meeting here with equal fervor, shrank, and covered her face with her hands.

"Therese, my daughter, look upon me," said the mother.

"It is her voice," cried Therese, joyfully, removing her hands. Frau Von Paradies stood by, smiling.

* It frequently happened that not only women, but men also, fainted, when Mesmer played on the Glass-Harmonicon. Justinus Kerner, page 42.

† Therese's own words Justinus Kerner. P. 68.

"Is this my mother?" continued she, looking up into her face. "Yes — it must be so; those tearful eyes are full of love. Oh, mother, come nearer, and let me look into those loving eyes!"

Her mother leaned over her, but again Therese recoiled. "What a frightful thing!" said she with a look of fear.

"What Therese? What is frightful?" asked her mother.

"Look at your mother, Therese," said Mesmer. She heard the well-beloved voice, and her hands fell from her eyes.

"Now tell me, what disturbs you," said Frau Von Paradies.

Therese raised her hand and pointed to her mother's nose. "It is that," said she. "What is it?"

"It is my nose!" exclaimed her mother, laughing, and her laugh was echoed throughout the room.

"This nose on the human face is horrible," said Therese. "It threatens me as though it would stab my eyes."*

"I will show you the figure of a man who threatens," said Mesmer, assuming an angry air, clinching his fists, and advancing a few paces.

Therese fell upon her knees with a cry. "You will kill me!" exclaimed she, cowering to the floor.

The spectators were thunderstruck. Even Professor Barthe yielded to the overwhelming evidence of his senses.

"By heaven, it is no deception!" exclaimed he. "She sees!"

"Since Professor Barthe is convinced, no one will dare dispute the fact," observed Mesmer, loud enough to be overheard by the Professor.

Barthe frowned, and pretended not to hear. He already repented of what he had said, and would have bought back his own words with a handful of ducats. But it was too late. Every one had heard him, and on every side murmurs of astonishment and of admiration grew into distinct applause.

Meanwhile, Therese was greeting her father and her other relatives. But she, who had always been so affectionate, was now embarrassed and cold.

"I knew it," said she, sadly. "I knew that the gift of sight would not increase my happiness. Imagination had drawn your images, and I loved the pictures she had painted. But now that I see you with the eyes of flesh, my heart recoils from participation in the sad secrets which your care-worn faces reveal. Ah, I believe that love, in its highest sense, is known to the blind alone! But where is Bello? Let me see my dog, the faithful companion of my days of dependence."

Bello had been whining at the door, and as Fran Von Paradies opened it, he bounded to his mistress, caressing her with his paws, and licking her hands.

Therese bent over him, and the dog raised his eyes to hers. She stroked his glossy, black coat, and, for the first time since she had recovered her sight, she smiled.

"This dog is more pleasing to me than man," said she, communing

* These are the exact words of Therese. Justinus Kerner, page 68.

with herself. "There is truth in his eyes, and his face does not terrify me, like those of my own race."*

"I think we may take our leave," growled Professor Barthe, "the comedy is over, and the relations and friends can applaud the author and the actress. I don't feel it my duty to remain for that purpose."

"Nor I," added Doctor Ingenhaus, as he prepared to accompany the Professor. "My head is in a whirl with the antics of this devilish doctor."

"Take me with you," said father Hell. "I must go and look after my planets. I'm afraid we shall miss another Pleiad."

So saying, the representatives of science took their leave. At the door they met with Count Von Langermann, the messenger of the Empress.

"Ah, gentlemen," said he, "you are hastening from this enchanted spot to announce its wonders to the world. No one will venture to doubt when such learned professors have seen and believed. I, myself, am on my way to apprise the Empress of Mesmer's success."

"Pray inform the Empress, also, that we have seen an admirable comedy, Count," said Barthe, with a sneer.

"A comedy!" echoed the Count. "It is a marvellous reality. Yourself confessed it, Professor."

"A careless word, prematurely uttered, is not to be accepted as evidence," growled Barthe.

"Such astounding things demand time for consideration. They may be optical delusions," added Ingenhaus.

"Ah, gentlemen, the fact is a stubborn one," laughed Count Langermann. "Therese Von Paradies has recovered her sight without couching-knife or lancet, and I shall certainly convey the news of the miracle to the Empress."

"What shall we do?" asked the Astronomer of his compeers, as Count Langermann bowed and left them.

Professor Barthe answered nothing.

"We must devise something to prop up science, or she will fall upon our heads and crush us to death," said Ingenhaus.

"What are we to do," repeated Barthe, slowly, as after an embarrassing silence, the three had walked some distance together down the street. "I will tell you what we must do. Treat the whole thing as a farce, and maintain, in the face of all opposition, that Therese Von Paradies is still blind."

"But, my honored friend, unhappily for us all, you have made this impracticable by your awkward enthusiasm."

"I spoke ironically, and the ass mistook sarcasm for conviction."

"Yes, and so did everybody else," sighed Hell. "You will find it difficult to convince the world that you were not in earnest."

"Perhaps to-day and to-morrow, I may fail to convince the world, but day after morrow it will begin to reason and to doubt. If we do not

* Therese's own words. Justinus Kerner, page 68.

oppose this quack with a strong phalanx of learned men, we will all be sneered at for our previous incredulity. Now I adhere to my text. Therese Von Paradies is blind, and no one shall prove to me that she can see. Come to my study and let us talk this provoking matter over.

Meanwhile, Therese was receiving the congratulations of her friends. She gazed at their unknown faces with a melancholy smile, and frowned when it was said to her, "this is the friend whom you love so much."—"This is the relative whose society has always been so agreeable to you."

Then she closed her eyes, and said they were weary. "Let me hear your voices, and so accustom myself to your strange countenances," said she. "Speak, dear friends, I would rather know you with the heart than with these deceiving eyes."

Suddenly, as one of her female companions came up to greet her, Therese burst into a merry laugh. "What absurd thing is that, growing out of your head?" asked she.

"Why, that is the *coiffure*, which you like the best," replied her mother. "It is a *coiffure à la Mategnon*."

Therese raised her hands to her own head. "True, the very same towering absurdity. I will never wear it again, mother."

"It is very fashionable, and you will become accustomed to it."

"No, I shall never be reconciled to such a caricature. Now that I can choose for myself, I shall attend less to fashion than to fitness in my dress. But I have seen mankind—let me see nature and heaven. Mesmer may I look upon the skies?"

"Come, my child, and we will try if your eyes can bear the full light of day," replied Mesmer, fondly, and taking her arm he led her towards the window.

But Therese, usually so firm in her tread, took short, uncertain steps, and seemed afraid to advance.

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed she, clinging anxiously to Mesmer, "see how the windows come towards us! We will be crushed to death!"

"No, Therese, it is we who advance, not they. You will soon acquire a practical knowledge of the laws of optics, and learn to calculate distances and sizes as well as the rest of us."

"But what is this?" cried she, as they approached the tall mirror that was placed between the windows.

"That is a mirror."

"And who is that man who is so like yourself?"

"That is only the reflection of my person in the mirror."

"And who is that ridiculous being with the *coiffure à la Mategnon*?"

"That is yourself."

"I!" exclaimed she, quickly advancing to the mirror. But suddenly she retreated in alarm. "Gracious heaven, it comes so fast that it will throw me down." Then she stopped for a moment and laughed. "See,"

said she, "the girl is as cowardly as myself. The further I step back the further she retreats also."

"All this is an optical delusion, Therese. The girl is nothing but a reflection, a picture of yourself in the mirror."

"True, I forgot. You told me that just now," replied Therese, drawing her hand wearily across her forehead. "Well let me contemplate myself. This, then, is my likeness," said she, musing. "My mother was mistaken. This face is not handsome. It is weary and soulless.—Come, master, I have enough of it, let me see the heavens."

"Wait until I draw the curtain to see whether you are able to bear the full light of day."

The curtain was lifted, and Therese, giving a scream, hid her eyes.

"Oh, it cuts like the point of a dagger!" cried she.

"I thought so; you will have to become gradually accustomed to it. You shall see the sky this evening. But now you must suffer me to bind up your eyes, for they must have rest."*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY.

THE Emperor Joseph was in his cabinet, engaged in looking over the letters and documents of the day, when a page announced his Highness Prince Kaunitz. Joseph waved his hand in token of consent, and when the Prince appeared at the door, rose to meet him as he entered the room.

"It must be business of State that brings your Highness to my study at this early hour," said the Emperor.

"It is indeed, sire," said Kaunitz, taking the chair which Joseph himself had just placed for him.

"And it must be a day of rejoicing with you, Prince, for I see that you wear every order with which you have been decorated by every court in Europe. What does this display signify?"

"It signifies, sire, that the day has come, which I have awaited for twenty years—the day for which I have schemed and toiled, and which for me shall be the proudest day of my life. I go out to battle, and if I am to be victorious, your Majesty must come to my assistance."

"Is it a duel with the Empress in which I am to be your second? I thank you for the honor, but you know that I have no influence with my

* The description of Therese's impressions, and the words she used upon the recovery of her sight, are not imaginary. They are all cited by Justus Kerner, and were related to him by her own father.

lady-mother. I am an Emperor without a sceptre. But tell me Kaunitz, what is the cause of the trouble?"

"You know it, sire, and I have come to prove to you that I am a man of my word, and keep my promises."

"I do not remember that you ever promised me anything."

"But I do. I remember a day on which my young Emperor came to me to complain of a wrong which had been inflicted upon him at Court."

"Marianne!" exclaimed the Emperor, with a sigh. "Yes, yes, the day on which I lost sight of her forever."

"Yes, sire. The Emperor, worthy of his high vocation, relinquished the girl who had found favor in his eyes, and for this sacrifice I promised him my loyal friendship. Three objects formed the ties that bound us together on that day. Does your Majesty remember?"

"Yes. You promised to place Austria at the head of European affairs; you have done so. You promised indemnity for Silesia; we have it in our recent acquisitions in Poland."

"I promised, also, to crush the priesthood, and to ruin the Jesuits," cried Kaunitz, exultingly, and I am here to fulfil my promise. The hour has come; for I am on my way to obtain the consent of the Empress to the banishment of the Jesuits from Austria."

"You will never obtain it. Attachment to the order of Jesus is an inheritance with the House of Hapsburg, and my mother styles me a degenerate son because I do not participate in the feeling."

"We will find means to alienate the Empress," said Kaunitz, quietly.

"I hope so, but I doubt it. Tell me what I am to do, and I am ready to make another charge against them."

Prince Kaunitz opened his pocket-book, and took from thence a letter which he handed to the Emperor.

"Will your Majesty have the goodness to hand this to the Empress? It is a letter from Carlos III., in which he earnestly requests his illustrious kinswoman to give protection no longer to the Jesuits, whom he has driven forcibly away from Spain."

"Indeed?" said the Emperor, smiling. "If that is all, the Spanish Ambassador might have delivered it quite as well as I."

"No, sire, that is not all. It was the King of Spain's request that your Majesty should deliver the letter, and sustain it by every argument which your well known enmity to the Jesuits might suggest."

"I am more than willing to undertake it; but to-day, as ever, my representations to the Empress will be vain."

"Do your best, sire, and I will come to your relief with a reserved force, which will do good service. Only allow me to request that you will not quit the Empress until the reserve comes up."

"Then the parts we are to play are distributed and learned by heart?"

"Just so, and heaven be propitious, that the scenery may work well, and the actors may know their cue."

"We have accomplices then?"

"I will be accompanied by the Papal Nuncio, and if your Majesty permits me, I will go for him at once. In half an hour I will come to the rescue.

"Go, then, and I fly to the Empress," cried Joseph, with exultation.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DOMINUS AC REDEMPTOR NOSTER.

TRUE to their agreement, the Emperor sought an interview with his mother. Not enjoying, like her Prime Minister, the privilege of entering the Empress's presence without formal leave, Joseph was always obliged to wait in her ante-room until the Chamberlain returned with her Majesty's answer. To-day the Empress was propitious, and gave word for her son to be admitted to her private cabinet at once. That he might enter promptly upon the object of his visit, the Emperor opened the interview by handing the letter of the King of Spain and requesting her Majesty to read it in his presence.

The Empress, surprised at the urgency of the demand, sat before her *escritoire* and read the missive of her royal relative; while her son, with folded arms, stood near a window, and scrutinised her countenance.

He saw how gradually her expression lowered, until heavy folds corrugated her brow and deep heavings agitated her chest.

"Those are the sea-gulls that announce the coming storm," said he, to himself. "I must be on my guard lest I be engulfed in the foaming waves."

As if she had guessed his thoughts, Maria Theresa raised her eyes from the letter, and darted a look of displeasure at her son.

"Is the Emperor aware of the contents of this letter?" asked she.

"I believe so, your Majesty," replied he, coming forward and bowing. "It is an urgent request on the part of the King of Spain to have the Jesuits removed from Austria."

"Nothing less," cried the Empress, indignantly. "He expects me to assume all his enmity towards the Jesuits, and urges it in a most unseemly manner. Doubtless, he requested your Majesty to present his letter in person, because it is well known that in this, as in all other things, your opinions are at variance with those of your mother. I presume this is a new tilt against my predilections, like that in which you overthrew me but a few weeks since, when I signed the act that ruined Poland. Speak out. Are you not here to sustain the King of Spain?"

"Yes, I am, your Majesty," cried Joseph, reddening. "I would do

as the King of Spain has done. I would importune you until the power of the Jesuits is crushed in Austria as it has been crushed in France and in Spain."

"You will not succeed!" cried the Empress, trying to control her rising anger. "I make no protest against the action of the Kings of France, Spain, or Portugal, for I presume that they have decided according to their convictions; but in Austria the Jesuits deserve all praise for their enlightened piety, and their existence is so essential to the well-being of the people, that I shall sustain and protect them as long as I live."*

"Then," cried Joseph, passionately, "Austria is lost. If I were capable of hate, I should hate these Jesuits, who propagating the senile vagaries of an old Spanish dotard, have sought to govern the souls of men, and have striven for nothing on earth or in heaven save the extension of their own influence and authority."

"It appears to me that my son has no reason to lament over the softness of his own heart," replied Maria Theresa, bitterly. "If he were absolute sovereign here, the Jesuits would be exiled to-morrow, and the King of Prussia, for whom he entertains such unbounded admiration, would be the first one to offer them shelter. I will answer your vituperation, my son, by reading to you a letter written by Frederic to his agent in Rome. It relates to the rumor now afloat that the Pope is about to disperse the holy brotherhood. I have just received a copy of it from Italy, and it rejoices me to be able to lay it before you. Hear your demi-god."

The Empress took a paper from her escritoire, and unfolding it, read aloud.

"Announce distinctly, but without bravado, that as regards the Jesuits, I am resolved to uphold them for the future, as I have done hitherto. Seek a fitting opportunity to communicate my sentiments on the subject to the Pope. I have guaranteed free exercise of religion to my subjects in Silesia. I have never known a priesthood worthier of esteem than the Jesuits. Add to this, that as I am an infidel, the Pope cannot dispense me from the obligation of performing my duty as an honorable man and an upright sovereign. FREDERIC."*

"Well," asked the Empress, as she folded the letter, "shall the infidel shame the christian? Would you seriously ask of me to be less clement to the priesthood than a Protestant Prince? Never, never shall it be said that Maria Theresa was ungrateful to the noble brotherhood, who are the bulwarks of order and of legitimate authority."

Joseph was about to make an angry retort, when the door opened and a page announced, with great formality:

"His Highness, Prince Kaunitz, and his Eminence, the Papal Nuncio, Monsignore Garampi."

The two Ministers followed close upon the announcement, and the Nuncio was received by the Empress with a beaming smile.*

"I am curious to know what has brought Prince Kaunitz and the Pa-

* Peter Philip Wolf: General history of the Jesuits, vol. 4, page 53.

pal Nuncio together," said she. "It is unusual to see the Prime Minister of Austria in the company of church-men. It must, therefore, be something significant which has united church and state to-day."

"Your Majesty is right," replied Kaunitz, "the visit of the Nuncio is so significant for Austria, that the visit of your Majesty's Minister in his company, was imperative."

"Your Eminence comes to speak of State affairs?" inquired the Empress, surprised.

The Nuncio drew from his robe a parchment to which was affixed a ribbon with the Papal seal.

"His Holiness instructed me to read this document to your Apostolic Majesty," said Monsignore Garampi, with a respectful inclination of the head. "Will your Majesty allow me?"

"Certainly," said the Empress, leaning forward to listen.

The Nuncio then unfolded the parchment, and amid the breathless attention of all present, read the celebrated document, which in history, bears the name of its first words: "*Dominus ac Redemptor Noster.*"—This letter stated that in all ages the Pope had claimed the right to found religious orders or to abolish them. It cited Gregory, who had abolished the order of the Mendicant Friars, and Clement V., who had suppressed that of the Templars. It then referred to the Society of the Brotherhood of Jesus. It stated that this society had hitherto been sustained and fostered by the Papal See, on account of its signal usefulness and the eminent piety of its members. But of late, the Brotherhood had manifested a spirit of contentiousness among themselves, as well as towards other orders, organizations and universities; and had thereby fallen under the displeasure of the Princes from whom they had received encouragement and protection."

When the Nuncio had read thus far, he paused and raised his eyes to the face of the Empress. It was very pale and agitated, while the countenance of the Emperor, on the contrary, was flushed with triumph. Joseph tried to meet the glance of Prince Kaunitz's eye, but it was blank as ever; sometimes fixed vacantly upon the Nuncio, and then turning, with cold indifference, towards the speaking countenances of the devoted friend and inveterate enemy of the Order of Jesus.

"Go on, your Eminence," at length faltered the Empress.

The Nuncio bowed and continued in an audible voice: "Seeing that between the Holy See and the Kings of France, Spain, Portugal and the Sicilies, misunderstandings had arisen which were attributable to the influence of the Order of Jesus, seeing that the Society at this present time had ceased to bear the rich fruits of its past usefulness, the Pope, after conscientious deliberation, had resolved, in the fullness of his apostolic right, to suppress the brotherhood."

A loud cry burst from the lips of the Empress, as overwhelmed by these bitter tidings she covered her face with her hands. The Emperor approached, as though he wished to address her, but she waved him off impatiently.

“Away, Joseph!” said she. “I will listen neither to your condolence nor to your exultation. Let me advise you too, to moderate your transports, for this is Austrian soil, and no one reigns in Austria but Maria Theresa. The Jesuits have been a blessing to mankind; they have instructed our youth, and have been the guardians of all knowledge; they have encouraged the Arts and Sciences, and have disseminated the Christian faith in every part of the world. They have been the true and loyal friends of my house, and in their day of adversity, though I may not defend them against their ecclesiastical superiors, I will protect them against malice and insult.”

Thus spoke the generous and true-hearted Maria Theresa, but her efforts to sustain the Jesuits, as an organized brotherhood, were fruitless. They were an ecclesiastic fraternity, and as such, their existence was beyond the reach of civil authority. As individuals, they were her subjects, but as a society, they were amenable to the laws of the Church, and they stood or fell, by that code alone.

Bravely she struggled; but the earnest representations of the Nuncio, the sharp, cutting arguments of Kaunitz, and her own reluctance to come to a rupture with the Pope in a matter essentially within ecclesiastical jurisdiction, all these things united, bore down her opposition; and with the same reluctance as she had felt in acquiescing to the partition of Poland, she consented to the suppression of the Society of Jesus.

“Come hither my son,” said the Empress, reaching her hand to Joseph. “Since I have seen fit to give my consent to this thing, I have nothing wherewith to reproach you. As co-regent I hope that what I am about to say will obtain your approbation. Monsignore, you have read to me the order of his Holiness, Clement XIV, for the suppression of the Jesuits. For my part, nothing would ever have induced me to expel them from my dominions. But since his Holiness sees fit to do so, I feel it to be my duty, as a true daughter of the Church, to allow the order to be put into execution.* Acquaint his Holiness with my decision, and remain a few moments that you may witness the promptitude with which his intentions are to be carried out.”

She sat down to her escritoire, and tracing a few lines upon a piece of paper, handed it to Prince Kaunitz.

“Prince,” said she, “here is the order which in accordance to strict form must be in my own hand writing. Take it to Cardinal Migazzi. Let him carry out the intentions of the Pope, and himself perform the funeral rights of the devoted sons of Jesus.”

She turned her head away, that none might see the tears which were streaming from her eyes. Then rising from her seat, she crossed the room. Those who had brought this grief upon her watched her noble form, and as they saw how her step faltered, they exchanged silent glances of sympathy. As she reached the door, she turned, and then they saw her pale, sad face and tearful eyes.

* The Empress's own words. Gross Hoffinger, vol. 1, page 198.

"When the Cardinal visits the College of the Jesuits to read the Papal order, let an imperial Commissarius accompany him," said Maria Theresa in an imperative tone. "Immediately after its promulgation he shall promise to the Jesuits my imperial favor and protection, if they submit to the will of the Pope as becomes true servants of God and of the Church. It shall also be exacted that the proceedings against the Order of Jesus shall be conducted with lenity and due respect, and for the future, I shall never suffer that any member of the society shall be treated with contumely and scorn."*

She bowed her lofty head, and withdrew.

Complete silence followed the disappearance of the Empress. No one dared to violate the significance of the moment by a word. The Nuncio bowed low to the Emperor and retired; but as Kaunitz was about to follow, Joseph came hastily forward and clasped him in his arms.

"I thank you," whispered he. "You have fulfilled your pledges, and Austria is free. My obligations to you are for life!"

The two ministers then descended together to the great palace-gate where their state-carriages awaited them.

Prince Kaunitz greeted the Nuncio with another silent bow, and shrinking from the blasts of a mild September day,† wrapped himself up in six cloaks, and sealed up his mouth with a huge muff of sables. He then stepped into his carriage, and drove off. Once safe and alone within his exhausted receiver, he dropped his muff for a moment, and wonderful to relate—he smiled.

"Let things shape themselves as they will," said he thoughtfully, "I am absolute master of Austria. Whether the sovereign be called Maria Theresa, or Joseph, it is all one to me. Both feel my worth, and both have vowed to me, eternal gratitude. Poland has fallen—the Jesuits are dispersed—but Kaunitz is steadfast, for he is the pillar upon which the imperial house leans for support!"

Four weeks after the publication of the papal order by Cardinal Migazzi, the doors of the Jesuit College were opened, and forth from its portals came the brotherhood of the order of Jesus.

Led by their superior, all in their long black cassocks, with rosaries hanging at their blue girdles, they left the familiar home, which had been theirs for a hundred years. Each one carried in his hands his Bible and breviary. The faces of the brothers were pale and unspeakably sad, and their lips were compressed as though to thrust back the misery that was surging within their hearts.

The multitude were mute as they. Not a word, whether of sympathy or of animosity greeted the silent procession. On went the noiseless spectre-like train until it reached the market-place. There the Superior stopped, and the brothers gathered around him in one vast circle.

He uncovered his head, and all followed his example. All bowed

* The Empress's words. Adam Wolf. Maria Theresa. P. 432.

† The Papal order was promulgated in Vienna on Sept. 10, 1793.

their heads in prayer to the God who had willed that this great humiliation should befall them. In one last petition to Heaven for resignation, they bade adieu to their glorious past with its glorious memories; and the people overcome by the simple sublimity of the scene, fell upon their knees and wept, repeating while they wept the prayers which they had learned from the teachers with whom they were parting forever.

The prayer was ended, and now the Superior went from brother to brother, taking the hand of each one. And every man faltered a blessing which their chief returned. So he went from one to another until he had greeted them all; then passing from the crowd, with a Jesuit on either side, he disappeared.

So ended the dispersion of the order of Jesus, whom the whole world believed to be crushed forever. But they knew better, for as crowding around their chief they had whispered "Shall we ever be a brotherhood again?" he had returned the pressure of their friendly hands, and had replied with prophetic fervor.

"Yes—whenever it be God's will to reinstate us. Wait patiently for the hour. It will surely come, for Loyala's order is immortal like the soul!"

CHAPTER XL.

HEART STRUGGLES.

THE week of delay which the Empress had granted to the Countess Margaret had passed away and the eve of her bridal had dawned. The Countess had been more fitful than ever during those eight eventful days, and her uncle's household had suffered accordingly.

"She will take her life," whispered the servants among themselves, as each day, like a pale spectre, she glided through the house to mount her wild Arabian. The two footmen, who accompanied her on these occasions, told how she galloped so madly that they could scarcely keep pace with her; and then suddenly checked her horse, and with her head bent over its neck, remained motionless and wept.

Once the Emperor had surprised her in tears, and when she became aware of his presence, she started off on a mad run and left him far behind. This occurred twice; but the third time the Emperor came upon her so quickly that before she had time to fly, he had grasped her rein. The footmen declared that they had never heard such a cry as she gave; and they thought that the Emperor would be highly offended. But he only laughed, and said,

"Now, Countess, you are my prisoner, and I shall not allow my beautiful Amazon to go until she has told me why we never see her at court."

The Countess turned so pale that her servants thought she would fall from her horse, and the Emperor cried out, "Good heaven! what is the matter with you?"

She broke into a loud laugh, and striking her horse with the whip, tried to gallop off again. But the Emperor put spurs to his horse, and the two dashed on together. Neck and neck they ran; the Countess lashing her Arabian until he made wild leaps into the air, the Emperor urging his Barb with whip and spur until his flanks were white with foam. At last he came so near that he made a grasp at her rein and caught it, exclaiming, with a merry laugh,

"Caught again!"

The Countess turned around with eyes that darted lightning.

"Why do you laugh so immoderately?" said she.

"Because we are enacting such a delightfully comic scene. But do not look so angry; your bright eyes are on fire, and they make a man's heart boil over. Answer my question and I restore you to freedom.—Why do you shun me, and why do you never come to court?"

Now the pale cheeks flushed, and the voice was subdued until its tones were like plaintive music. "Sire, I do not visit the court because I am a poor, unhappy creature, unfitted for society, and because no one misses me there."

"And why do you fly from me as if I were Lucifer, the son of the morning?"

"Ah, your Majesty, grief flies from the light of day, and seeks the cover of friendly night! And, now, free my horse, if you would not have me fall dead at your feet."

Again she turned pale, and trembled from head to foot. When the Emperor saw this, he loosed her rein, and bowing to his saddle-bow, galloped away out of sight. The Countess turned her horse's head and went slowly home.

All this, Count Starhamburg learned from the footmen, for never a word had his niece spoken to him since the unhappy day of Count Esterhazy's visit. To say the truth, the old man was not sorry that her sorrow had taken the shape of taciturnity; for her pale cheeks and glaring eyes affrighted him, and he hugged himself close in his short-lived security, as each day she declined to appear at table, and was served in the solitude of her own room.

She was served, but her food returned untouched. Neither did she seem to sleep, for at all times of the night she could be heard pacing her room. Then she would sit for hours before her piano; and, although her playing and singing had been equally renowned, her uncle had never suspected the genius that had lain concealed in the touch of her hands and the sound of her voice. It was no longer the "fierce Countess," whose dashing execution had distanced all gentler rivals; it was a timid

maiden, whose first love was finding utterance in entrancing melody.— On the night following her last encounter with the Emperor, the music became more passionate in its character. It was less tender, but far more sad, and often it ceased, because the musician stopped to weep.

Her uncle heard her sob, and following the impulse of his affection and compassion, he opened the door of her room, and came softly in.

He called her, and she raised her head. The light from the wax candles that stood on the harpsichord, fell directly upon her face, which was bedewed with tears. Her uncle's entrance seemed neither to have surprised nor irritated her; with an expression of indescribable woe, she merely murmured,

"See, uncle, to what the Empress has reduced me!"

Her uncle took her in his arms, and like a weary child, she leaned her head upon his shoulder. Suddenly she started, and disengaging herself, she stood before him and took his hands in hers.

"Oh, is it inevitable! Must I bow my head, like a slave, to this marriage, while my heart proclaims an eternal no!"

The old Count wiped his eyes. "I fear there is no hope, my child, I have done all that I could."

"What have you done?"

"I first appealed to Count Esterhazy; but he declared himself to be too intoxicated by your beauty, to resign you. I then tried to interest some of our friends at court; but no one dared to intercede for my darling. The Empress has received a severe blow in the expulsion of the Jesuits, and no one has the courage to come between her and her mania for match-making. I then appealed to her Majesty, myself; but in vain. Her only answer was this: You are to marry the Count or go into a convent. She added, that to-morrow everything would be prepared in the court-chapel for your marriage; that she, herself would honor you by giving you away, and that if you did not come punctually when the imperial state-coach was sent for you, she would have you taken instead, to a convent."

"Is that all?" asked she, with a painful blush.

"No, Margaret; I saw the Emperor also."

"What said he?" asked the Countess, in a hoarse voice, pressing so heavily upon the old man's shoulder that he could scarcely stand under the weight of her hands.

"Word for word, tell me what he said!"

"I will tell you. The Emperor said: 'Dear Count, no one would serve you sooner than I, but as regards her mania for marrying people, the Empress is inflexible. And indeed, it seems to me, that she has chosen admirably for your beautiful niece. Count Esterhazy is young, handsome, immensely rich, and a favorite at court. You will see, dear Count, that she will end by making him an affectionate and obedient wife; for a young girl's hate is very often nothing but concealed love.' Those were the Emperor's words, my dear. I protested against his interpretation of your dislike to Count Esterhazy, but in vain.

To this Margaret replied not a word. Her hands had fallen gradually from her uncle's shoulders until they hung listless at her side; her graceful head was bowed down by the sharp stroke of the humiliation which had just stricken her, and her whole attitude was that of hopeless disconsolation.

After a few moments, she threw back her head with wild defiance.—“He will find that he is a false prophet,” exclaimed she, with a laugh of scorn. “I promise him that.”

“But, my dear girl,” began Count Starhemberg.

“Will you, too, insult me with prophecies of my future *obedience* to this fine young man? Do you, too, wish to prove to me that I am a fortunate——”

“My child, I wish nothing of the sort.”

“Then what means the ‘but?’ Does it mean that I am to be consoled by the splendor that is to attend this—execution? Does it mean that my maidenly blushes—the blushes that betray my secret love, are to be hidden by a veil of priceless lace? Does it mean that the chains with which your peerless Empress will fetter my arms, are to be of gold, secured with diamonds? Have you taken care to provide the myrtle wreath, the emblem of love, wherewith to deck the bride's brow? Oh, God! oh, God! May some imperial daughter of this woman suffer worse than death for this!”

The Count shuddered, and left the room. He had not dared to say that in truth her bridal dress was all that she had described. It had all been chosen—the rich robe, the costly veil, the golden bracelets, the glittering diamonds, even the myrtle wreath—the emblem of the humble as well as the high-born bride. All were there, awaiting the morrow.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FORCED BRIDAL.

THE ceremony was to take place at eleven o'clock. The imperial carriage of state was at the door, and behind it stood the gilded coaches of Counts Esterhazy and Starhemberg. The former had been awaiting the appearance of his bride for two hours; but to all his tender messages she had curtly replied that she would come when she was ready.

“I fear she will play us some dreadful trick,” sighed the old Count.

“My dear Count,” returned Esterhazy, “no man would be so presuming as to thwart the Empress.”

"Perhaps not—but my niece has more character than some men."

"What have I done for her to scorn me as she does!" cried the unhappy little bridegroom.

"You have opposed her, that is all. My niece is an Amazon, and cannot bear to give up her heart at another's will. Had she been left free, it might have been otherwise."

"Do you really think she will come to love me?" asked Esterhazy, surveying his diminutive comeliness in the mirror opposite.

"I am quite sure of it, and so is the Emperor. Take courage then, bear with her whims for awhile, they are nothing but harmless summer lightnings. Do not heed the storm; think of the flowers that will spring up to beautify your life, when the showers of her tears shall have passed away."

"Oh, I will be patient. She shall exhaust herself."

Here the door opened, and the Countess's maid entered with a request that Count Esterhazy would follow her to her lady's apartment.

The Count kissed his hand to Count Starhemberg and hurried away. When he entered the Countess's sitting-room she was standing in all the pride of her bridal attire, and seemed more transcendently beautiful than ever. The court-dress, with its long train, heightened the elegance of her figure, and the silver-spotted veil, that fell to her feet, enveloped her like a white evening cloud.

But how little did her face accord with this superb festive dress!—Her cheek was deathly pale, her exquisite mouth was writhing with anguish, and her great, glowing eyes darted glances of fiery hatred.

"You really have the courage to persevere, Count Esterhazy? You will perpetrate the crime of marriage with me?"

"When a man opens his arms to receive the most enchanting woman that was ever sent on earth, do you call that crime?" said Esterhazy, tenderly.

An impatient shrug was the answer to this attempt at gallantry.

"Have I not told you that you would earn nothing for your reward by my hatred? In the despair of my heart, have I not told you that I love another man? Oh, you have come to tell me that you spare me the sacrifice—have you not? You will not force a helpless girl to marry you who does so only to escape a convent—will you? Oh, tell me that you have summoned manliness enough to resist the Empress and to give me my freedom!"

"I have summoned manliness enough to resist *you* and bearing *your* anger, I am resolved to take the bewitching woman to wife, whom my generous Empress has selected for me."

"You are a contemptible coward," cried she.

"I forgive you the epithet, because I am in love," replied he, with a smile.

"But if you have no pity for me," cried she wildly, "have pity on yourself. You have seen how I treat my uncle, and yet I love him dearly. Think what your fate will be since I hate you immeasurably."

"Ah," said he, "can you expect me to be more merciful to myself than to you? No, no! I rely upon my love to conquer your hate. It will do so all in good time."

"As there is a God in heaven, you will rue this hour!" cried Margaret with mingled defiance and despair.

"Come, Countess, come. The Empress and her son await us in the court-chapel."

Margaret shivered, and drew her veil around her. She advanced towards the door, but as the Count was in the act of opening it, she laid her two hands upon his arm, and held him back.

"Have mercy on my soul," sobbed she. "It is lost if I become your wife. I have a stormy temper, and sorrow will expand it into wickedness. I feel that I shall be capable of crime if you force me to this marriage!"

"Gracious heavens!" cried the Count, pettishly, "if you abhor me to such a degree, why do you not go into a convent?"

"I had resolved to do so, for the convent is less repulsive to me than a home in your palace; but I could not bring myself to the sacrifice. No!—Were I to be immured within those convent walls, I should forever be shut out from the sight of him whom I love. Do you hear this? Do you hear that I marry you only to be free to see him, to hear his voice, to catch one glance of his eye as he passes me in the crowd?—Oh, you will not take to wife a woman who meditates such perjury as this! You will not give your father's name to her who is going to the altar with a lie upon her lips and a crime upon her soul! Go—tell all this to the Empress. Tell her that you will not disgrace your noble house by a marriage with me! Oh, Count Esterhazy, be merciful, be merciful!"

"Impossible, Countess, impossible; were it even possible for me to belie you by such language. I shall not see the Empress until we stand before the altar together, and then she will be in her oratorium, far beyond my reach."

"Yes, yes, you can reject me at the altar. Oh, see how I humble myself! I am on my knees before you. Spurn me from you in the face of the whole world!"

Count Esterhazy looked thoughtful. On her knees the Countess unhappily was more beautiful than ever, so that remembering her uncle's words, he said to himself,

"Yes—I will humor her—I must feign to yield."

He stretched out his hands, saying, "Rise, Countess. It does not become a sovereign to kneel before her slave. I have no longer the power to oppose your will. Before the altar, I will say 'no' to the Priest's question, and you shall be free."

The Countess uttered a loud cry of joy, and rose to her feet. And as her pale cheek kindled with hope, and her eyes beamed with happiness, she was more beautiful than she had ever been in her life before, and Count Esterhazy exulted over it.

"God bless you!" exclaimed she, with a heavenly smile. "You have earned my affection now; for my life I vow to love you as a cherished brother. Come, dear, generous, noble friend, come. Let us hasten to the chapel."

It was she now who opened the door. Count Starhemberg awaited them in the drawing-room. Margaret flew to meet him, and embracing him said,

"Do I not look like a happy bride now? Come, uncle, come, dear Count Esterhazy, let us go to our bridal."

She took Esterhazy's arm and he placed her in the carriage. The old Count followed in speechless wonder.

At the door of the chapel they were met by the Empress's first lady of honor, who conducted the bride to the altar. The Emperor walked by the side of Count Esterhazy. The face of the Countess was radiant with happiness, and all who saw her confessed that she was lovely beyond all description.

And now the ceremonial began. The Priest turned to Count Esterhazy and asked him if he took the Countess Margaret Von Starhemberg for his wedded wife, to love, honor, and cherish her until death should them divide.

There was a pause, and Margaret looked with a bright smile at the face of her bridegroom. But the eyes of the spectators were fixed upon him in astonishment, and the brow of the Empress grew stormy.

"Will you take this woman for your wedded wife?" repeated the Priest.

"I will," said Esterhazy, in a loud, firm voice.

A cry escaped from the lips of Margaret. She was so faint that she reeled and would have fallen, but for the friendly support of an arm that sustained her, and the witching tones of a voice that whispered: "Poor girl, remember that a cloister awaits you."

She recognised the voice of the Emperor; and overcoming her weakness, the courage of despair came to her help.

She raised herself from Joseph's arms and taking the *vinaiquette* that was tendered her by the lady of honor, she inhaled its reviving aroma; then she looked at the Priest.

He continued, and repeated his solemn question to her. Etiquette required that before she answered, she should have the sanction of the Empress. The Countess turned, with a low inclination, to the lady of honor, who, in her turn, curtsied deeply to the Empress.

Maria Theresa bowed acquiescence, and the bride, having thanked her with another curtsy, turned once more to the Priest and said "Yes."

The ceremony was over, and the young couple received the congratulations of the court. Even the Empress, herself, descended from the oratorium to meet them.

"I have chosen a very excellent husband for you," said she smiling, "and I have no doubt you will be a very happy woman."

"It must be so, of course, your Majesty," replied the bride, "for had

your Majesty not ascertained that this marriage had been made in heaven, you would not have ordered it on earth, I presume."

Maria Theresa darted a look of anger at the Countess, and turning her back upon such presumption, offered her good wishes to the Count.

"What did you say to irritate the Empress so?" whispered Joseph to the bride.

Margaret repeated her words. "That was a bold answer," said he.

"Has your Majesty ever taken me for a coward? I think I have shown preter-human courage this day."

"What! Because you have married Count Esterhazy? Believe me, you will be the happiest of tyrants and he the humblest of your slaves."

"I will show him that slaves deserve the lash!" cried she, with a look of hatred at her husband, who came forward to conduct her to the palace, where the marriage guests were now to be received.

The festivities of the day over, the Empress's lady of honor conducted the Countess to her new home. It was the duty of this lady to assist the bride in removing her rich wedding-dress, and assuming the costly *négligé* which lay ready prepared for her on a lounge in her magnificent dressing-room.

But the Countess imperiously refused to change her dress. "Have the goodness," said she, "to say to her Majesty, that you conducted me to my dressing-room. You can say further," added she, hearing the door open, "that you left me with Count Esterhazy."

She pointed to the Count, who entered, greeting the ladies with a respectful bow.

"I will leave you then," said the lady, kissing Margaret's forehead. "May heaven bless you!"

Count Esterhazy was now alone with his wife. With a radiant smile and both hands outstretched, he came towards her.

"Welcome to my house, beautiful Margaret. From this hour you reign supreme in the palace of the Esterhazys."

The Countess stepped back. "Do not dare to touch my hand. A gulf yawns between us, and if you attempt to bridge it, I will throw you, headlong, into its fiery abyss."

"What gulf? Point it out to me, that I may bridge it with my love," cried Esterhazy.

"The gulf of my contempt," said she, coldly. "You are a coward and a liar. You have deceived a woman who trusted herself to your honor, and God in heaven, who would not hear my prayers, God shall be the witness of my vengeance. Oh, you shall repent from this hour to come, that ever you called me wife. I scorn to be a liar like you, and I tell you to beware. I will revenge myself for this accursed treachery."

"I do not fear your revenge, for you have a noble heart. The day will come when I shall be forgiven for my deception. Heaven is always clement towards the repentant sinner, and you are my heaven, Margaret. I await the day of mercy."

"Yes, you shall have such mercy as heaven has shown to me!" cried

she. "And now, sir, leave this room. I have nothing more to say to you."

"What, Margaret!" said Esterhazy, with an incredulous smile, "you would deny me the sweet right of visiting your room? Chide, if you will, but be not so cruel. Let me have the first kiss —"

Margaret uttered a fearful cry, as he attempted to put his arms around her. Freeing herself, with such violence that Esterhazy reeled backwards with the shock, she exclaimed,

"You are worse than a coward, for you would take advantage of rights which my hatred has annulled forever."

"But, Margaret, my wife —"

"Count Esterhazy," said Margaret, slowly, "I forbid you ever to use that word in this room. Before the world I will endure the humiliation of being called your wife; but once over the threshold of my own room, I am Margaret Starhemberg, and you shall never know me as any other Margaret. Now go!"

She pointed to the door, and as the Count looked into her face, where passion was so condensed that it almost resembled tranquility, he had not the hardihood to persist. He felt that he had gained his first and last victory.

As soon as he had passed the door, Margaret locked and bolted it, then alone with the supreme anguish that had been crushed for these long, long hours, she fell upon her knees, and wept until the morning star looked down upon her agony.

CHAPTER XLII.

PRINCE LOUIS DE ROHAN.

THE Cardinal Prince, Louis de Rohan, French Ambassador at Vienna, had petitioned the Empress for a private audience, and the honor had been granted him. It was the first time since a year that he had enjoyed this privilege, and the proud Prince had determined that all Vienna should know it, for all Vienna was fully aware of the Empress's dislike to him.

Accompanied by a brilliant *cortège*, the Prince set out for the palace. Six footmen stood behind his gilded carriage, while inside, seated upon cushions of white satin, the Prince dispensed smiles to the women, and nods to the men, who thronged the streets to get a glimpse of his magnificence. Four pages, in the Rohan livery, dispensed silver coin to the populace, while behind, came four carriages, bearing eight noblemen of

the proudest families in France, and four other carriages which bore the household of the haughty Prince of church and realm.*

The cortège moved slowly, and the people shouted. From every window, burgher's or nobleman's, handsome women greeted the handsome Cardinal, who was known to be a *connaisseur* in female beauty.—The crowd outside followed him to the palace gates, and when his carriage stopped, they shouted so vociferously that the noise reached the ears of the Empress, and so long, that their shouts had not ceased when the Cardinal, leaving his brilliant *suite*, was ushered into the small reception room, where Maria Theresa awaited him.

She stood by the window, and half turned her head as the Prince, with profoundest salutations, came forward. She received his obsequious homage with a slight inclination of the head.

"Can your Eminence tell me the meaning of this din?" asked she, curtly.

"I regret not to be able to do so, your Majesty. I hear no din; I have heard nothing save the friendly greetings of your people, whose piety edifies my heart as a Priest, and whose welcome is dear to me as a *quasi*-subject of your Majesty. For the mother of my future queen must allow me the right to consider myself almost as her subject."

"I would prefer that you considered yourself wholly the subject of my daughter; as I doubt whether she will ever find much loyalty in *your* heart, Prince. But before we go further, pray inform me what means all this parade attendant upon the visit of the French Ambassador here to-day? I am not aware that we are in the carnival, nor have I an unmarried daughter for whom any French Prince can have sent you to propose."

"Surely your Majesty would not compare the follies of the Carnival with the solemnity of an imperial betrothal," said the Archbishop, deferentially.

"Be so good as not to evade my question. I ask why you came to the palace with a procession just fit to take its place in a Carnival?"

"Because the day on which the mother of the Dauphiness receives me, is a great festival for me. I have so long sued for an audience that when it is granted me, I may well be allowed to celebrate it with the pomp which befits the honor conferred."

"And in such a style that all Vienna may know it, and the rumor of your audience reach the ears of the Dauphiness herself."

"I cannot hope that the Dauphiness takes interest enough in the French Ambassador to care whether he be received at a foreign court or not," replied the Cardinal, still in his most respectful tone.

"I request you to come to the point," said Maria Theresa, impatiently. "Tell me, at once, why you have asked for an audience? What seeks the French Ambassador of the Empress of Austria?"

"Allow me to say that had I appeared to-day before your Majesty as

* In the beginning of the year '80, Prince de Rohan was made Cardinal and Grand Almoner of France. Before that time, he had been Archbishop of Strasburg. *Memoires sur la vie privee de Marie Antoinette*, vol 1, page 47.

the French Ambassador, I would have been accompanied by my *attachés* and received by your Majesty in state. But your Majesty is so gracious as to receive me in private. It follows, therefore, that the Cardinal de Rohan, the cousin of the Dauphin, visits the imperial mother of the young Dauphiness."

"In other words, you come hither to complain of the Dauphiness-consort; again to renew the unpleasant topics which have been the cause of my repeated refusals to see you here."

"No, your Majesty, no. I deem it my sacred duty to speak confidentially to the mother of the Dauphiness."

"If the mother of the Dauphiness-consort will listen," cried the proud Empress, sharply emphasising the word "consort."

"Pardon me, your Majesty, the apparent oversight," said de Rohan, with a smile. "But as a Prince of the Church, it behoves me, above all things, to be truthful, and the Dauphiness of France is not yet Dauphiness-consort. Your Majesty knows that as well as I."

"I know that my daughter's enemies and mine have succeeded so far in keeping herself and her husband asunder," said the Empress, bitterly.

"But the Dauphiness possesses in her beauty, worth and sweetness, weapons wherewith to disarm her enemies, if she would but use them," said de Rohan, with a shrug. "Unhappily she makes no attempt to disarm them."

"Come—say what you have to say without so much circumlocution," cried Maria Theresa, imperiously. "What new complaint have the French against my daughter?"

"Your Majesty is the only person that can influence the proud spirit of the Dauphiness. Maria Antoinette adores her mother, and your Majesty's advice will have great weight with her."

"What advice shall I give her?"

"Advise her to give less occasion to her enemies to censure her levity and her contempt of conventional forms."

"Who dares to accuse my daughter of levity?" said the Empress, her eyes flashing with angry pride.

"Those, who in the corruption of their own hearts, mistake for wantonness, that which is nothing more than the thoughtlessness of unsuspecting innocence."

"You are pleased to speak in riddles. I am Maria Theresa,—not Oedipus."

"I will speak intelligently," said de Rohan, with his everlasting smile. "There are many things innocent in themselves, which do not appear so to worldly eyes. Innocence may be attractive in a cottage, but it is not so in a palace. An ordinary woman, even of rank, has the right, in the privacy of her own room, to indulge herself in childish sport; but your Majesty's self cannot justify your daughter when I tell you that she is in the habit of playing wild games with the young ladies who have been selected as her companions."

"My poor, little Antoinette!" exclaimed the Empress, her eyes fill-

ing with compassionate tears. "Her enemies, who do not allow her to be a wife, might surely permit her to remain a child! I have heard before to-day of the harmless diversions which she enjoys with her young sisters-in-law. If there were any sense of justice in France, you would understand that to amuse half-grown girls, the Dauphiness must herself play the child. But I know that she has been blamed for her natural gayety, poor darling, and I know that Madame de Marsan will never forgive her for feeling a sisterly interest in the education of the young Princesses of France.* I know that the salons of Madam de Marsan are a hot-bed of gossip, and that every action of the Dauphiness is there distorted into crime.† If my lord Cardinal has nothing else to tell me, it was scarcely worth his while to come to the palace in so pompous a manner, with such a solemn face."

"I did not come to your Majesty to accuse the Dauphiness, but to warn her against her enemies, for unfortunately she *has* enemies at court. These enemies not only deride her private diversions, but with affectation of outraged virtue, they speak of recreations, hitherto unheard of at the court of France."

"What recreations, pray?"

"The Dauphiness, without the sanction of the King, indulges in private theatricals."

"Private theatricals! That must be an invention of her enemies."

"Pardön me, your Majesty, it is the truth. The Dauphiness and her married sisters-in-law, take the female characters, and the brothers of the King, the male. Sometimes Monsieur de Campan, the Private Secretary of the deceased Queen, and his son who fills the same office for the Dauphiness, join the actors. The royal *troupe* give their entertainments in an empty *entre-sol*, to which the household have no access. The Count of Provence plays the *jeune premier*, but the Count d'Artois also is considered a good performer. I am told that the costumes of the Princesses are magnificent, and their rivalry carried to the extreme."

The Empress, affecting not to hear the last amiable remark, said:

"Who are the audience?"

"There is but one spectator, your Majesty, the Dauphin himself."

Maria Therese's face lighted up at once, and she smiled.

The Cardinal went on: "The aunts of the Dauphin, themselves, are not admitted to their confidence, lest they might inform the King, and his Majesty forbid the indecorous representations."

"I shall write to the Dauphiness and advise her to give up these representations," said Maria Theresa, calmly, "not because they are indecorous, but because they are a pretext for her enemies. If she has the approbation of her husband, that of itself, ought to suffice to the court, for it is not an unheard thing to have dramatic representations by the royal family. Louis XIV. appeared on the boards as a dancer, and even

* Madam de Marsan was their governess.

† Memoires de Mme. de Campan. Vol. 1, page 65.

under the pious Madame d'Maintenon, the princes and princesses of France, acted the dramas of Corneille and Racine."

"But they had the permission of the King, and none of them were future queens."

"What of that? If the Queen approved of the exhibition, the Dauphiness might surely repeat it. My daughter is doing no more at Versailles than she has been accustomed to do at Schönbrunn in her mother's presence."

"The etiquette of the two courts is dissimilar," said d'Rohan, with a shrug. "In Vienna an Archduchess is permitted to do that, which in Paris, would be considered an impropriety."

"Another complaint!" cried the Empress, out of patience.

"The Dauphiness finds it a bore," continued d'Rohan, "to be accompanied wherever she goes by two ladies of honor. She has, therefore, been seen in the palace, even in the gardens of Versailles, without any escort, except that of two servants."

"Have you come to the end of your complaints?" said the Empress scarcely able to control her passion.

"I have, your Majesty. Allow me to add that the reputation of a woman seldom dies from a single blow; it expires gradually from repeated pricks of the needle; and Queens are as liable to such mortality as other women."

"It ill becomes the Prince de Rohan to pass judgment upon the honor of women," cried Maria Theresa, exasperated by his lip-morality. "If the French Ambassador presumes to come to me with such trivial complaints as I have heard to-day, I will direct my Minister in Paris to make representations to the King of another and a more serious nature."

"Regarding the unpardonable indifference of the Dauphin to his wife?" asked the Cardinal with sympathising air.

"No. Regarding the unpardonable conduct of the French Ambassador in Vienna," exclaimed the Empress. "If the Cardinal is so shocked at a slight breach of etiquette, he should be careful to conceal his own deformities under its sheltering veil. Innocence may sin against ceremony; but he who leads a dissolute and voluptuous life, should make decorum a shield wherewith to cover his own shame!"

"I thank your Majesty for this axiom so replete with worldly wisdom. But for whom can it be intended? Certainly not for the Dauphiness?"

"No—for yourself, Prince and Cardinal!" cried the Empress, beside herself with anger. "For the Prelate who, unmindful of his rank and of its obligations, carries on his shameless intrigues even with the ladies of my court. For the Ambassador who, leading a life of oriental magnificence, is treading under foot the honor of his country, by living upon the credulity of his inferiors. All Vienna knows that your household make unworthy use of your privileges as a foreign minister by importing goods free of tax, and re-selling them here. All Vienna knows that there are more silk stockings sold at the hotel of the French embassy

than in all Paris and Lyons together. The world blames me for having revoked the privilege enjoyed by foreign embassies to import their clothing free of duty. It does not know that the abuse of this privilege by yourself has forced me to the measure."

"Your Majesty is very kind to take so much trouble to investigate the affairs of my household. You are more *cu fait* to the details than myself. I was not aware for instance, that silk stockings were sold at the embassy—no more than I was aware that I had had any *amours* with the ladies of the Court. I have a very cold heart, and perhaps that is the reason why I have never seen one to whom I would devote a second thought. As regards my manner of living, I consider it appropriate to my rank, titles and means; and that is all that I feel it necessary to say on the subject."

"You dispose of these charges in a summary manner. To hear you, one would really suppose there was not the slightest ground for reproach in your life," said the Empress satirically.

"That this is quite within the range of possibility, is proved by the case of the Dauphiness," replied de Rohan. "If your Majesty thinks so little of her breaches of etiquette, it seems to me that mine are of still less consequence. And allow me to say that the French nation will sooner forgive me a thousand intrigues with the ladies of Vienna, than pass over the smallest deviation from Court usages on the part of the Dauphiness. Marie Antoinette has defied them more than once, and I fear me, she will bitterly repent her thoughtlessness. Her enemies are watchful and——"

"Oh I see that they are watchful!" exclaimed Maria Theresa, "I see it. Do not deny it, you are one of those whose evil eyes see evil-doing in every impulse of my dear defenceless child's heart. But have a care, Sir Cardinal—the friendless Dauphiness will one day be Queen of France, and she will then have it in her power to bring to justice those who persecute her now!"

"I hope that I will never be accused of such fellowship," said de Rohan for the first time losing his proud self-possession.

"I—the Empress of Austria accuse you to day of it!" cried Maria Theresa with threatening mien. "Oh my lord, it does you little honor, you a royal personage and a prince of the church, to exchange letters with a Dubarry, to whose shameless ears you defame the mother of your future Queen!"

"When did I do this? When was I so lost to honor, as to speak a disrespectful word of the Empress of Austria?"

"Ah! you deny it—do you?—Let me tell you that your praise or your blame are all one to me; and if I have granted you this interview it was to show you how little I am disturbed by your censorious language. I know something of the intriguing at Versailles. I have even heard of the private orgies of the "Oeil de boeuf," where Louis entertains his favorites, and I will tell you what took place at the last one.

The Countess Dubarry was diverting the company with accounts of the hypocrisy of the Empress of Austria, and to prove it, she drew a letter from her pocket-book saying: 'Hear what the Cardinal de Rohan says about her.' Now Cardinal, do you still deny that you correspond with her?"

"I do deny it," said the Prince firmly. "I deny that I ever have written her a word."

The Empress took from her pocket a paper, and read as follows: "True, I have seen Maria Theresa weeping over the fate of Poland; but this Sovereign, who is such an adept in the art of dissimulation, appears to have tears and sighs at her command. In one hand she holds her pocket-handkerchief, and in the other, the sword with which she cuts off a third of that unhappy country."* "Now Sir Cardinal, upon your sacred honor, did you, or did you not write these words?"

The Prince turned pale, and grasped the arm of the chair on which he sat.

"Upon your honor, and your conscience, before God,"—reiterated the Empress.

The Cardinal raised his eyes slowly, and in a low voice said, "I dare not deny it. I wrote them. In an unlucky hour I wrote them, but not to Dubarry."

"To whom then?"

"To one who has betrayed me to Dubarry. Far be it from me to name him. I alone will bear the weight of your Majesty's displeasure, I alone am the culprit."

"I know of no culprit in the matter," replied Maria Theresa, throwing back her stately head. "I stand before God and before the world, and every man has a right to pass sentence upon my actions—even the Cardinal de Rohan. I merely wish to show him, that the Dauphiness and her mother both know what to expect of his Eminence."

"The Dauphiness knows of this letter!" cried de Rohan.

"It is she who sent me this copy."

The Prince bowed his head down upon his hands. "I am lost," murmured he.

The Empress surveyed him with mistrust. Such emotion on the part of such a man astonished her, and she doubted its sincerity. "Why this comedy, Prince?" said she. "I have already told you that I am indifferent to your opinion."

"But the Dauphiness will never forgive me," said he uncovering his face. "My contrition is no comedy, for I look with prophetic eyes into the future, and there I see anguish and tears."

"For whom," said Maria Theresa scornfully.

"For me, and perchance for the Dauphiness. She considers me her enemy and will treat me as such. But hatred, is a two-edged sword which is as apt to wound the one who holds it as well as the one for whom it is unsheathed. Oh, your Majesty! warn the Dauphiness. She

* *Memoirs de Weber concernant Marie Antoinette*, Vol. 8, page 205.

stands upon the brow of a precipice, and if she do not recede, her enemies will thrust her headlong into the abyss below. Marie Antoinette is an angel of innocence and chastity, but the world in which she lives does not understand the language of angels; and the wicked will soil her wings that her purity may not be a reproach to their own foulness. Warn the Dauphiness to beware of her enemies; but as God hears me, I am not one of them. Marie Antoinette will never believe me, and therefore my fate is sealed. I beg leave of your Majesty to withdraw."

Without awaiting the answer, the Prince bowed and retired. Maria Theresa looked thoughtfully after him, and long after he had closed the door, she remained standing in the centre of the room a prey to the anxious misgivings which his visit had kindled in her heart.

"He is right," said she, after a time. "She wanders upon the edge of a precipice, and I must save her. But oh, my God! Where shall I find a friend who will love her enough to brave her displeasure, and, in the midst of the flattery which surrounds her, will raise the honest voice of reproof and censure? Ah she is so unhappy, my little Antoinette, and I have no power to help her! Oh, my God! succor my persecuted child!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE POLES AT VIENNA.

THE three Powers which had lived so long at variance, had united themselves in one common cause, the pacification of Poland. In vain had Stanislaus refused his assent to their friendly intervention: in vain had he appealed to England and France for help. Neither of these Powers was willing, for the sake of unhappy Poland, to become involved in a war with three nations, who were ready to hurl their consolidated strength against any sovereign who would have presumed to dispute their joint action.

In vain King Stanislaus began by swearing, that sooner than consent to the dismemberment of Poland, he would lose his right hand. The three Powers, tired of his impotent struggles, informed him, through their envoys at Warsaw, that there were limits to the moderation which decorum prescribed to governments—that they stood upon these limits and awaited his speedy acquiescence to the act of partition.* The Russian Empress added to this that, if Stanislaus did not call a convention

* Baumer's Contributions to Modern History. Vol. 4. page 516.

of the Polish Diet to recognise the act, she would devastate his land, so that he would not have a silver spoon left to him."*

The unhappy King had no longer the nerve to brave such terrific threats. He submitted to the will of his tyrants, and came in as a fourth Power, eager to obtain as much as he could for his own individual advantage.

The wretched Poles took no notice of the edicts of a King, who had been forced upon them by a strange sovereign. Only a few cowards and hirelings obeyed the call for a convention; so that in all, there were only thirty-six members, who, under the *surveillance* of Austrian and Prussian Hussars, signed their names to the act of partition.

The King of Prussia received Pomerelia and the district of Nantz; Russia took Leonia and several important waywodeships; and Austria obtained the county of Zips, a portion of Galicia and of Lodomeria, and half of the Palatinate of Cracow.

Here and there an isolated voice was raised to protest against the stupendous robbery; but it was lost amid the clash of arms and the tread of soldiery. Whenever a word was spoken that fretted the sensibilities of Austria or Prussia, Catharine said she was willing to bear all the blame of the thing; and laughing heartily, she called the protests that were sent on the subject, "*moutarde après diner.*" Frederic resorted to self-deception, proclaiming to the world "that for the first time the King and the Republic of Poland were established on a firm basis; that they could now apply themselves in peace to the construction of such a government as would tend to preserve the balance of power between proximate nations, and prevent them from clashing."†

The Poles, in silent rancor, submitted to their fate, and took the oath of allegiance to their oppressors. New boundary lines were drawn, and new names assigned to the sundered provinces of the dismembered fatherland. The citadels were given over to their foreign masters, and now the deed was consummated.

Even Maria Theresa rejoiced to know it, and whether to relieve her burthened heart, or to pretend to the world that she approved of the transaction, she ordered a solemn *Te Deum* to be sung in the Cathedral of St. Stephen, in commemoration of the event.

The entire court was to assist at this ceremony, after which the Empress was to receive the oath exacted from those of her new subjects who desired to retain possession of their property.

The ladies of the court were in the ante-room awaiting the entrance of the Sovereigns. Their handsome, rouged faces were bright with satisfaction, for they all had suffered from the misery which, for a year past, had been endured by their imperial mistress. Now they might look forward to serene skies and a renewal of court festivities, and they congratulated one another in triumph.

But they were cautious not to give too audible expression to their

* Raumer's Contributions to Modern History. Vol. 4, page 507.

† Raumer's Contributions, page 542.

hopes. They whispered their expectations of pleasure, now and then casting stolen glances at a tall figure in black, which, sorrowful and alone, stood tearfully regarding the crowds in the streets who were hurrying to church to celebrate her country's downfall. This was the Countess Von Salmour, governess to the Archduchess Marianna. Like the other ladies of the palace, she was to accompany the Empress to the Cathedral, but it was clear to all beholders that to her this was a day of supreme humiliation.

The great bell of St. Stephen's announced to her people that the Empress was about to leave the palace. The folding-doors were flung open and she appeared leaning on the arm of the Emperor, followed by the princes, princesses, generals, and statesmen of her realms. Silently the ladies of honor arranged themselves on either side of the room to let the imperial family pass by. Maria Theresa's eyes glanced hastily around, and fell upon the pale, wan features of the Countess Von Salmour.

All eyes now sought the face of the unhappy lady, whose sad, mourning garments were in such striking contrast with the magnificent dresses of the ladies around her.

"Madam Von Salmour," said the Empress, "I dispense you from your duties for this day. You need not accompany the court to church."

The Countess curtsied deeply, and replied, "Your Majesty is right to excuse me, for had I gone with the court to church, I might have been tempted to utter treason to heaven against the oppressors of my country."

The company were aghast at the audacity of the rejoinder, but the Empress replied with great mildness,

"You are right; for the temptation would indeed be great, and it is noble of you to speak the truth. I respect your candor."

She was about to pass on, but paused as though she had forgotten something.

"Is the Countess Wielopolska in Vienna?" asked she.

"She arrived yesterday, your Majesty."

"Go to her while we are at church," said Maria Theresa, compassionately.

Madam Von Salmour glanced towards the Emperor, who with an expression of painful embarrassment, was listening to their conversation.

"Pardon me, your Majesty," said the lady, "the Countess Wielopolska is making preparations for a journey, and she receives no one. We parted yesterday. To-morrow she leaves Vienna forever."

"I am glad that she intends to travel," said Maria Theresa, approvingly. "It will divert her mind;" and with a friendly smile, she took leave of the governess, and passed on.

Joseph followed with wildly throbbing heart; and neither the triumphant strains of the *Te Deum*, nor the congratulatory shouts of his subjects, could bring back serenity to his stormy brow. He knelt before the altar, and with burning shame, thought of his first entry into St.

Stephen's as Emperor of Austria. It had been the anniversary of the deliverance of Vienna by John Sobieski and his Poles; and in the self-same spot where the Emperor had thanked God for this deliverance, he now knelt in acknowledgement for the new principalities which were the fruits of his own ingratitude to Poland.

From these painful and humiliating retrospections, the Emperor's thoughts wandered to the beautiful being who, like a Hamadryad, had blended her life with the tree of Polish liberty. He thought of that face, whose pallid splendor reminded him of the glories of waning day, and he listened through the long, dim aisles of memory, to the sound of that enchanting voice, whose melody had won his heart long ago on that first, happy evening at Neustadt.

The Countess Wielopolska was leaving Vienna forever, and yet there was no message for him. A longing, that seemed to drown him in the flood of its intensity, rushed over his soul. He would fly to her presence and implore her to forgive the chant of victory that was rejoicing over her country's grave! Oh, the crash of that stunning harmony, how it maddened him, as kneeling, he listened to its last exultant notes!

It was over, and Joseph scarcely knew where he was, until his mother laid her hand upon his shoulder and motioned him to rise.

In the great reception-room, with all the pomp of imperial splendor, Maria Theresa sat upon her throne and received the homage of her new subjects. Each one, as he passed, knelt before the powerful Empress, and as he rose, the Chief Marshal of the household, announced his name and rank.

This ceremony over, Maria Theresa descended from the throne to greet her Polish subjects in a less formal manner. No one possessed to a greater degree than herself, the art of bewitching those whom she desired to propitiate; and to-day, though her youth and beauty were no longer there to heighten the charms of her address, her elegant carriage, her ever-splendid eyes, and graceful affability, were as potent to win hearts as ever. Discontent vanished from the faces of the Poles, and by and by they gathered into-groups, in which were mingled Hungarians, Italians and Austrians, all the subjects of that one great Empress.

The majority of the Poles had adopted the French costume of the day. Few had possessed the hardihood to appear before their new sovereign in their rich, national dress. Among these few was an old man of tall stature and distinguished appearance, who attracted the attention of every one present.

While his countrymen unbent their brows to the sunshine of Maria Theresa's gracious words, he remained apart in the recess of a window. With scowling mien and folded arms, he surveyed the company; nor could the Empress, herself, obtain from him more than a haughty inclination of the head.

The Emperor was conversing gaily with two Polish noblemen, whose cheerful demeanor bore evidence to the transitory nature of their national grief, when he observed this old man.

"Can you tell me," said he, "the name of yonder proud and angry nobleman?"

The faces of the two grew scarlet, as following the direction of the Emperor's finger, they saw the eyes of the old man fixed, with scorn, upon their smiling countenances.

"That," said one of them, uneasily, "is Count Kannienki."

"Ah, the old partisan leader!" exclaimed the Emperor. "As he does not seem inclined to come to me, I will go forward and greet him myself."

So saying, Joseph crossed over to the window where the old Count was standing. He received him with a cold, solemn bow.

"I rejoice to meet Count Kannienki, and to express to him my esteem for his character," began the Emperor, reaching out his hand.

The Count did not appear to perceive the gesture, and merely made a silent bow. But Joseph would not be deterred from his purpose by a *hauteur* which he knew very well how to excuse.

"Is this your first visit to Vienna?" asked he.

"My first and last visit, sire."

"Are you pleased with the Austrian capital?"

"No, your Majesty, Vienna does not please me."

The Emperor smiled. Instead of being irritated at the haughtiness with which his advances were met, he felt both respect and sympathy for the noble old man who disdained to conceal his discontent from the eyes of the sovereign himself.

"I wonder that you do not like Vienna. It has great attractions for strangers, and you meet so many of your countrymen here just now.—There never were as many Poles in Vienna before."

An angry glance shot athwart the face of the old man. "There were many more when John Sobieski delivered Vienna from the hands of *her* enemies," said he. "But that is almost a hundred years ago, and the memory of princes does not extend so far to the obligations of the past.* But," continued he, more courteously, "I did not come here to speak of my country. We must be resigned to the fate apportioned to us by Providence, and you see how readily my countrymen adapt themselves to the vicissitudes of their national life."

"And yet, Count, their smiles are less pleasing to me than your frowns. In spite of the present, I cherish the past, and honor those who mourn over the misfortunes of their native land."

The old man was touched, and looked at the handsome, expressive face of the Emperor. "Sire," said he, sadly, "if Stanislaus had resembled you, Poland would have been free. But I have not come hither to-day to whine over the unalterable past. Nor did I come to pay homage to the Empress."

Nevertheless the Empress would rejoice to become acquainted with the brave Count Kannienki. Allow me Count, to present you."

* This whole conversation is historical. It was often related by the Emperor, who said that he had been so touched by Count Kannienki's patriotism and boldness, that but for the fear of a repulse, he would have embraced him. Swinburne, vol. 1, page 349.

Kannienski shook his gray locks. "No, sire, I came to Vienna purely for the sake of a woman who will die under the weight of this day's anguish. I came to console her with what poor consolation I have to bestow."

"Is she a Pole?" asked Joseph, anxiously.

"Yes, sire: she is the last true-hearted Polish woman left on earth, and I fear she is about to die upon the grave of her fatherland."

"May I ask her name?"

"Countess Anna Wielopolska. She it is who sent me to the palace, and I came because she asked of me one last friendly service."

"You bring me a message?" faltered the Emperor.

"The Countess begs to remind the Emperor of the promise he made on the day when the Empress signed the act of——"

"I remember," interrupted the Emperor.

"She asks, if mindful of his promise, he will visit her to-morrow afternoon at six o'clock."

"Where shall I find her?"

"In the very same room which she occupied before. I have delivered my message. Your Majesty will, therefore, permit me to withdraw."

He bowed and turned away. Slowly and proudly he made his way through the giddy crowd, without a word of recognition for the frivolous Poles, who saluted him as he passed.

"He is the last Polish hero, as she is the last Polish heroine," sighed the Emperor, as he followed the old man with his eyes. "Our destiny is accomplished. She would bid me a last farewell."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LAST FAREWELL.

COUNTRESS ANNA WIELOPOLSKA was alone in her room, which, like herself, was decked to receive some great and distinguished guest. A rich carpet covered the floor, flowers bloomed in costly vases, the piano was opened, and the music on the stand showed that the Countess still found consolation in her genius. But she, herself, was strangely altered since the day on which she had thrown her boquet to the Emperor in Neustadt. Nevertheless, she wore the same dress of black velvet, the same jewels, and in her bosom, the same boquet of white roses, bound with a long scarlet ribbon.

Her heart beat high, and her anxious eyes wandered to the little

bronze clock that stood upon a *console* opposite. The clock struck six, and her pale cheeks flushed with anticipated happiness.

"It is the hour," said she. "I shall see him once more." And as she spoke a carriage stopped, and she heard his step within the vestibule below. Trembling, in every limb, she approached the door, and bent her ear to listen.

"Yes, he comes," whispered she, while, with a gesture of extreme agitation, she drew from her pocket a little case, from whence she took a tiny flask, containing a transparent, crimson liquid. She held it for a few seconds to the light, and now she could hear the sound of his voice, as he spoke with Matuschka in the ante-room. The steps came nearer and nearer yet.

"It is time," murmured she, and hastily moving the golden capsule that covered the phial, she put it to her lips and drank it to the last drop.

"One hour of happiness," said she, replacing the phial in her pocket, and hastening back to the door.

It was opened, and the Emperor entered the room. Anna met him with both hands outstretched, and smiled with unmistakable love as he came forward to greet her. Silent, but with visible agitation, the Emperor looked into those eyes which were already resplendent with the glory of approaching death. Long they gazed upon each other without a word, yet speaking love with eyes and lips.

Suddenly the Emperor dropped her hands, and laying his own gently upon her cheeks, he drew down her head, and rested it upon his breast. She left it there and looked up with a tender smile.

"Do not speak, love," said he, gently. "I am an astrologer, who looks into his heaven to read the secrets there." "And, oh," sighed he, after he had gazed for a time, "I see sorrow and suffering written upon that snowy brow. Tears have dimmed the splendor of my stars, but they have not been able to lessen their beauty. I know you again, my queen of the night, as you first appeared to me at Neustadt. You are still the same proud being, Anna."

"No, dearest, no. I am a trembling woman, craving nothing from earth save the glance of my beloved, and the privilege of dying in his embrace."

"She who loves desires to live for her lover," said he, pressing her again and again to his heart.

"Death is the entrance to eternal life, and she who truly loves, will love throughout eternity."

"Speak not of death in this hour of ecstasy, when I have found you once more as I had pictured you in dreams. Oh, Anna, Anna! will you part me from you again? Have you indeed brought me hither to cheat me with visions of love, and then to say farewell forever!"

"No, Joseph, I bid you eternal welcome. Oh, my lover, my soul has gone forth to meet yours, and nothing shall ever part us again."

"And are you mine at last!" cried Joseph, kissing her passionately.

"Has the statue felt the ray of love, and uttered its first sweet sound!"

Oh, how I have longed to hear that sound! I have gone about by day, wearing the weight of sovereignty upon my fainting shoulders, and by night I have wept like a love-sick boy for your sake, Anna, but no one suspected it. No one knew that the Emperor was unhappy."

"I knew it," whispered she. "I knew it, for your sorrows have all been mine."

"No, no!" cried Joseph, awaking from his dream of bliss, "you told me that Poland was dearer to you than I. I remember it now! You refused me your hand, and forsook me for the sake of your country."

"But, now, beloved," said she, clinging to him, "now I am but a woman—a woman who abandons her fatherland with all its memories, and asks but one blessing of heaven—the blessing of living and dying in her lover's arms."

"Oh, if you would not kill me, speak no more of dying, Anna! Now you are mine, mine for life; and my heart leaps with joy as it did when first I heard your heavenly voice. Let me hear it once more. Sing to me, my treasure."

She went to the harpsichord, and the Emperor bent over her, smiling as he watched the motion of her graceful hands upon the keys. She struck a few full chords, and then glided into a melody of melancholy sweetness. The Emperor listened attentively; then, suddenly smiling, he recognized the song which she had sung before the King of Prussia and himself.

The words were different now. They represented Poland as a beggar queen, wandering from door to door, repulsed by all. She is starving, but she remembers that death will release her from shame and hunger."

The Countess was singing these lines,

"If life to her had brought disgrace,
Honor returns with death's embrace——"

when she stopped, and her hands fell powerless from the instrument.—The Emperor raised her head, and saw, with alarm, that her face was distorted by pain. Without a word, he took her in his arms, and carrying her across the room, laid her gently upon the sofa. She raised her loving eyes to his, and tried to steal her arm around his neck, but it fell heavily to her side. Joseph saw it, and a pang of apprehension shook his manly frame.

"Anna," groaned he, "what means this?"

"Honor returns with death's embrace," whispered she.

The Emperor uttered a savage cry, and raised his despairing arms to heaven. "And it was false," cried he, almost mad with grief, "it was false! She had not forgotten Poland. Oh, cruel, cruel Anna!" And he sobbed piteously, while she strove to put her trembling hand upon his head.

"Cruel to myself, Joseph, for I have just begun to value life. But I swore to my mother that I would not outlive the disgrace of Poland, and you would have ceased to love me had I violated my oath. For—

give the pain I inflict upon you, dearest. I longed for one single hour of happiness, and I have found it here. With my dying breath I bless you."

"Is there no remedy?" asked he, scarcely able to speak.

"None," said she, with a fluttering smile. "I obtained the poison from Cagliostro. Nay—dear one, do not weep; you see that I could not live. Oh, do not hide your face from me, let me die with my eyes fixed upon yours!"

"And," cried Joseph, "must I live forever?"

"You must live for your subjects—live to be great and good, yet ever mistrusted, ever misunderstood. But forward, my Prince, and the blessing of God be upon you! Think, too, that the Poles, my brethren, are among your subjects, and promise me to love and cherish them."

"I promise."

"Try to reconcile them to their fate—do not return their ill-will; swear to me that you will be element to my countrymen."

"I swear! I swear to respect their misfortunes, and to make them happy."

One last beaming smile illumined her face. "Thank you—dearest," said she, with difficulty. "My spirit shall look out from the eye of every Pole, to whom you will have given—one moment—of joy! Oh, what agony! Farewell!"

One more look—one shudder—and all was still.

The Emperor fell upon his knees by the body, and prayed long and fervently. The little clock struck seven. The hour of happiness had passed away forever.

The following day, Joseph, pale but perfectly calm, sought an interview with his mother.

"I come to ask leave of absence of your Majesty," said he, languidly.

"Leave of absence, my son? Do you wish to travel again so soon?"

"I *must* travel, your Majesty. I must make a journey to Galicia to become acquainted with our new subjects."

"Perhaps it might be as well for us to show them some consideration at this period. I had already thought of this; but I have been told that Galicia is rather an uncivilized country, and that the people are ill-disposed towards us."

"We cannot expect them to love their oppressors, your Majesty."

"No—but it is a dreadful country. No roads—no inns—miles and miles of uninhabited woods, infested by robbers. Oh, my son, postpone your journey to a milder season! I shall be trembling for your safety."

"There is no danger, your Majesty. Give me your consent, I am very, very desirous of visiting Poland."

"But no vehicle can travel there at this time of year, my son."

"I will go on horseback, your Majesty."

"But where will you get provisions, Joseph? Where will you rest at night?"

"I will rest wherever night overtakes me, either in a cottage, on my horse, or on the ground. And as for food, mother, if there is food for our people, there will be some for me; and if there should be scarcity, it is but just that I should share their hardships. Let me go, I entreat you."

"Go, then, my son, and God's blessing be with you," said the Empress, kissing her son's forehead.

"Joseph!" said she, as he was leaving the room, "have you heard that the poor, young Countess Anna has committed suicide on account of the troubles in Poland?"

"Yes, your Majesty," replied Joseph, without flinching.

"Perhaps you had better defer your journey for a day to attend her funeral. All the Poles will be there, and as we both knew and admired her, I think it would propitiate our new subjects if we gave some public mark of sympathy by following the body to the grave. I have forbidden mention to be made of the manner of her death, that she may not be denied a resting-place within consecrated ground."

How she probed his wound until the flesh quivered with agony.

"The Countess Wielopolska is not to be interred in Austria, your Majesty," said he. Count Kannienki will accompany the body to Poland. Near Cracow there is a mound wherein it is said that Wanda, the first Queen of Poland, was buried. Anna Wielopolska will share her tomb. Her heroic spirit could rest nowhere save in Poland. When I visit Cracow I will go thither to plant flowers upon her grave, that the white roses she loved, may grow from the consecrated earth that lies upon her heart."

CHAPTER XLV

THE CONCERT.

THERESE PARADIES was to give a concert, the first at which she had performed since the restoration of her sight. Of course the hall was thronged, for in spite of the incontrovertible fact itself, and of its corroboration by the Paradies family, there were two parties in Vienna,—one who believed in the cure, and the other who did not. Those who did not, doubted upon the respectable testimony of Professor Barthe, Doctor Ingenhaus, and the entire faculty, who, one and all, protested against the shameful imposition which Mesmer was practicing upon an enlightened public.

The audience, therefore, was less interested in Therese's music, won-

derful as it was, than in her eyes; for her father had announced, that during the pauses, Therese would prove to the incredulous that her cure was no deception.

Professor Barthe, Doctor Ingenhaus, and the Astronomer were there in the front row, sneering away the convictions of all who were within hearing. Herr Paradies now appeared, and as he stood reckoning the profits that were to gladden his pockets on that eventful evening, Barthe left his seat, and approached him.

"You really believe, do you, that your daughter sees?" said the Professor.

"She sees as well as I do. Were you not there to witness it yourself, when her bandage was removed?"

"I humored the jest to see how far the impudence of Mesmer and the credulity of his admirers would travel together. I hear curious accounts of your daughter's mistakes, granting her the use of her eyesight. It is said that some one presented her a flower, when looking at it, she remarked, "what a pretty star!" And did she not put a hair-pin in her mother's cheek, while trying to fasten her hair?"

"Yes, she did both these things, but I think they prove her to be making awkward use of a new faculty. She is not likely to know the name of a thing when she sees it for the first time; neither has she learned to appreciate distances. Objects quite close to her she sometimes stumbles upon, and those out of reach, she puts out her hand to take. All this will correct itself, and when Therese has become as familiar with perspective illusions as the rest of us, she will go out into the streets, and the world will be convinced."

"You really believe it then!"

"I am as convinced of it as that I see myself."

"It is very disinterested of you to publish it," said the Professor, looking significantly at the happy father. "This acknowledgement will cost you a considerable sum."

"How?" asked Von Paradies, frightened. "I do not understand."

"It is very simple nevertheless," said the Professor, carelessly. "Does the Empress give your daughter a pension?"

"Certainly. You know she does, and a handsome one, too."

"Of course it is lost to her," replied Barthe, enjoying the sudden paleness which overspread the radiant face of Von Paradies. "A girl who sees, has no right to the money which is given to the blind; and I heard Von Stork, this very day, saying that as soon as it was proved that your daughter could see, he intended to apply to the Empress for her pension in behalf of another party."

"But this pension is our chief support; it enables us to live very comfortably. If it were withdrawn, I should be a beggar."

"That would not alter the case. Pensions are granted to those who, by their misfortunes, have a claim upon the public charity. The claim dies from the moment that your daughter's infirmity is removed. Through the favor of the Empress, she has become a scientific musician, and this

now must be her capital. She can teach music and give concerts."

"But that will not maintain us respectably," urged Von Paradies, with increasing uneasiness.

"Of course it will not maintain you as you live with your handsome pension. But you need not starve. Be that as it may, there is a blind Countess who is my patient, for whom Von Stork is to obtain the pension as soon as you can convince the faculty that your daughter is no longer in need of it. This patient, I assure you, will receive it as long as she lives, for it will never enter into her head to fancy that she has been cured by Master Mesmer."

"But, my dear Professor," entreated Von Paradies, "have mercy on me and my family. For sixteen years we have received this income, and it had been secured to us during Therese's life-time."

"Nevertheless, it goes to the Countess, if she is not blind, I tell you. The Empress, so says Von Stork, has never refused a request of his, because he never asks anything but that which is just and reasonable."

"We are ruined!" exclaimed Von Paradies, in accents of despair.

"Not unless you prove to us that your daughter *is not deceiving you*," replied Barthe, with sharp emphasis. "If you can show her to be blind, you are saved; and Von Stork would petition the Empress, in consideration of the shameful imposition practiced upon your paternal love, to increase the pension. Well—this evening's entertainment will decide the matter. Meanwhile, adieu."

The Professor lounged back to his seat, leaving his poisoned arrow behind.

"I think," said Barthe, smiling as he saw the victim writhe, "that I have given him a receipt for his daughter's eyes that will be more potent than Mesmer's passes. It will never do to restore the age of miracles."

"No, indeed, if miracles are to make their appearance upon the stage of this world, what becomes of science?" asked Ingenhaus.

"Let us await the end of the farce," said the Professor. "Here she comes."

A murmur went through the hall as Therese entered. The guests rose from their seats to obtain a sight of her. They had known her from infancy, but to-night she was an object of new and absorbing interest, even to the elegant crowd, who seldom condescended to be astonished at anything.

Therese seemed to feel her position, for whereas she had been accustomed to trip into the concert-room with perfect self-possession, she now came forward timidly, with downcast eyes. The audience had always received her with enthusiasm, for she was a great artist; but now perfect silence greeted her entrance, for nothing was remembered, save the marvel which her appearance there was to attest.

Whether accidentally or intentionally, several chairs were in her way as she passed to the instrument. She avoided them with perfect confidence, scarcely brushing them with the folds of her white satin dress,

"She sees, she is cured! She is no longer blind," murmured the spectators, and with renewed curiosity, they watched her every motion.

There were three people within that concert-room upon whom these murmurs produced profound and dissimilar impressions.

Barthe frowned angrily, Von Paradies grew paler and trembled like a coward as he was, while Mesmer, who leaned against a pillar, fixed his eyes upon Therese with a glance of supreme happiness. Therese returned the glance with one of such deep trust and love, that no one who saw it could doubt her power of vision. The audience burst out into one simultaneous storm of applause, and this reminded the young girl that she was not alone with her "Master." She raised her eyes for the first time, towards the spectators, and met every glance directed towards herself.

The sight of this sea of upturned faces so terrified the poor child, that she felt faint and dizzy. She grouped about with her hands to find a seat, for she could scarcely stand.

The action attracted universal attention. A significant look passed between Von Paradies and Barthe, while Mesmer's brow darkened, and his face flushed with disappointment. It was very unfortunate—that faintness of Therese.

She stood irresolute and alone, unable to advance, and too weak to see the chair that stood close at hand.

For sometime, the audience surveyed her with breathless interest.— Suddenly, the silence was broken by a voice in the crowd:

"Will no one take pity upon the girl and lead her to the harpsichord? Do you not see that she is as blind as ever!"

Therese recovered herself when she heard these insulting words, and her eyes flashed strangely for eyes that could not see.

"I am not blind!" cried she, in a clear, firm voice, and as if the sneer had restored her strength and self-possession, she came forward at once, and took her seat.

The audience applauded a second time, and Therese bowed and smiled. While she drew off her gloves, she looked back at Mesmer, who returned the glance with one of affectionate pride.

Scarcely knowing what she did, Therese began to play. She kept her eyes fixed upon Mesmer, and as she felt the power of his magnetic glance, she soared into heights of harmony that ravished the ears of her listeners, and left all her previous performances far behind.

She ended with a sigh, as though awaking from some heavenly dream. Never had she been so enthusiastically applauded as now. This time it was not her vision, but her incomparable skill which had elicited the acclamations of the public, and Therese, happy in her success, bowed, and smiled again upon her admirers.

And now the artistic exhibition was at an end. Herr Von Paradies advancing, informed the public, that they would now proceed to test the genuineness of his daughter's cure. He then came to the edge of the platform, and spoke in a loud, distinct voice: "I request the distin-

guished company, who have brought books or music for the purpose, to hand them to me, that we may discover whether in truth she sees, or imagines that she sees. I beg so much the more for your attention, ladies and gentlemen," continued he, in a faltering voice, "that this night is to decide a fearful doubt in my own mind. Doctor Mesmer affirms that my daughter's vision has been restored. I, alas! believe that she is yet blind!"

The audience expressed astonishment, Therese uttered a cry of horror and turned to Mesmer, who, pale and stunned by the shock of her father's cruel words, had lost all power to come to the poor child's assistance.

Barthe was laughing behind his pocket-handkerchief. "The remedy works," whispered he to Ingenhaus, "the remedy works."

Two gentlemen arose. One handed a book, the other a sheet of music. As Von Paradies turned the book over to his daughter, she gave him a reproachful look. She opened it and read: "Emilia Galotti, by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing."

"And, now," continued she, "if one of the ladies present will select a passage, and another will look over me as I read, the audience can thus convince themselves that I see."

One of the most distinguished ladies in Vienna approached Therese and stood close by her side, while another, a celebrated actress, requested her to open the book at page 71.

Therese turned over the leaves and found the place.

"That is right, my love," said the Countess. "Now read."

Therese began to read, and when she ended, the excitement of the people knew no bounds.

"She sees! She sees!" cried the people. "Who can doubt it?"

And now from the crowd arose a voice.

"We have enough proof. The fact is self-evident, and we may all congratulate the *Fräulein* upon the recovery of her sight. Let us have more of her delightful music."

"I am sorry that I cannot agree with Doctor Mesmer's invisible patron," said Von Paradies. "I strive to forget that I am her father, and place myself on the side of the incredulous public, who have a right to demand whether indeed the days of miracles have returned."

"My remedy does wonders," said Barthe to the faculty.

Herr Von Paradies continued: "This being the case, it is easier for us to suppose that the distinguished actress, who selected the page, has been requested to do so, than to believe that my daughter has seen the words just read; for this lady is known to be a follower of Doctor Mesmer. Perhaps the Countess did not remark that the corner of the leaf is slightly turned down."

He took the book and passed the leaves rapidly over his thumb.

"Here it is," said he, holding it up.

"Father!" exclaimed Therese, indignantly, "I saw you turn the leaf a few minutes ago with your own hand."

"SAW!" cried Von Paradies, raising his hands. Then turning to the audience, he continued: "As regards this book, it was handed to me just now by Baron Von Horka, one of Mesmer's most devoted adherents. He may have been commissioned to select this particular work, and Therese may be aware of it. If I am thus stringent in my acceptance of the evidence in this case, it is because I long to possess the sweet assurance of my dear child's complete cure."

"Hear him," laughed Barthe, touching Ingenhaus on the elbow.

Therese, meanwhile, was growing embarrassed, and looking to Mesmer for encouragement, she lost sight of everything under the influence of his eyes. Her father held the paper before her but she was not aware of it. The audience whispered, but Mesmer at that moment, turning away from Therese, she sighed, and recovering her self-possession, took the paper and placed it before the harpsichord.

"March, from Oedipus," said she, seating herself before the instrument.

"Why, Therese," cried her father, "you read the title without turning to the title-page."

"I saw the piece when it was handed to you by Ritter Gluck."

"You are acquainted with Gluck?" asked Von Paradies. "He has never been to our house."

"I have seen him at Doctor Mesmer's," replied Therese.

"Ah, indeed! Ritter Gluck, who hands the music, is like Baron Von Horka, who brought the book, a friend of Mesmer's," said Von Paradies, with a sneer that affrighted his daughter and made her tremble.

But she placed her hands upon the keys and began to play.

The enraptured audience again forgot her eyes, and entranced by the music, hung breathless upon her notes, while she executed the magnificent funeral march in Oedipus. Suddenly, at the conclusion of a passage of exquisite beauty, she ceased, and her hands wandered feebly over the keys. Her father, who was turning the leaves, looked almost scornfully at the poor girl, who, alarmed and bewildered by his unaccountable conduct, grew deadly pale, and finally, with a deep sigh, closed her eyes.

After a few moments she began again. From her agile fingers dropped showers of pearly notes, while through all the fanciful combinations of sound, was heard the solemn and majestic chant of the funeral march. The audience could scarcely contain their raptures, and yet they dared not applaud for fear of losing a note.

She seemed to be astray in a wilderness of harmony, when her father, with an impatient gesture, laid his hands upon her fingers and held them down.

"You are no longer playing by note!" exclaimed he, with affected surprise. "You are giving us voluntaries from Orpheus, instead of the funeral march. I appeal to the public to say whether my daughter is playing the funeral march."

There was a pause, then a voice, tremulous with emotion, said: "No,

it is no longer the funeral march; it is now a beautiful arrangement from Orpheus."

Herr Von Paradies, with an expression of profoundest anguish, threw his arm around his daughter, exclaiming, "Oh, my beloved child, it is then as I feared! We have been deceived, and you are blind for life."

"Father!" screamed Therese, flinging him off; "Father you know—"

"I know that you are blind," cried he, following her, and again clasping her in his arms. "Come, my poor child, come, and fear nothing! Your father will work for you; and his hand shall guide your faltering steps. Oh, my child! May God forgive those who have brought this bitter disappointment upon my head! My dream of hope is over.—You are blind, Therese, hopelessly blind, and your father's heart is broken!"

The audience were deeply moved by this outburst of paternal grief and tenderness. Here and there were heard half-audible murmurs of sympathy, and many of the ladies had their handkerchiefs to their eyes. Everybody was touched except Professor Barthe. He, on the contrary, was chuckling with satisfaction, and felt much more inclined to applaud than to commiserate. He looked at Ingenhaus, who not being in the secret, was divided between sympathy for the father and indignation towards the charlatan. Indeed he had so far forgotten his own interest in the scene, that he was weeping with the rest.

"Console yourself, my friend," said Barthe, "all this is the result of my efforts in behalf of science. I deserve a public vote of thanks for having out-mesmered Mesmer."

He stopped—for Therese's voice was heard in open strife with her father. "Let me go!" cried she, with passion. "I am not blind. As God hears me, I see—but oh, how fearful have been the revelations that sight has made to me this night!"

Poor, poor Therese! The shock of her father's treachery had proved too great for her girlish frame. She reeled and fell back insensible in his arms.

Von Paradies, with simulated anguish, turned to the audience and bowed his stricken head. Then raising his daughter in his arms, he carried her away from the stage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

THERESE lay for several hours unconscious, while her mother wept, and watched over her, and her father stood by, sullenly awaiting the result.

At last she heaved a sigh and opened her eyes. "Where am I?" asked she, feebly.

"At home, darling," replied the tender mother, bending over and kissing her.

"No—I am in the fearful concert-room. They stare at me with those piercing daggers which men call eyes, and oh, their glances hurt me, mother! There they sit, heartlessly applauding my misery, because it has shaped itself into music! Let me go; I am strong, and I see!"

She attempted to rise but her father held her back. "Lie still, my child," said he, reproachfully; "it is vain for you to carry this deception further. Trust your parents, and confess that you are blind. Were it otherwise, you would not mistake your own familiar chamber for the vast concert-room. For Mesmer's sake, you have sought to deceive us, but it is useless, for we know that you are blind."

"You are blind—you are blind!" These oft repeated words seemed fraught with a power that almost made her doubt her own senses.—She saw, and yet she felt as if sight were receding from her eyes.

"Oh my God! Why will my father madden me!" cried the unhappy girl, rising in spite of all efforts to detain her, and looking around the room. "Ah—now I remember, I fainted and was brought home. Yes, father, yes, I tell you that I see," cried she wringing her hands, and writhing with the agony he was inflicting upon her. "I see in the window the blue flower-pot which Mesmer brought me yesterday—there opposite stands my harpsichord, and its black and white keys are beckoning me to come and caress them. Two open books lie upon the table, and over it are scattered drawings and engravings. Oh, father, have I not described things as they are?"

"Yes, child—you have long been familiar with this room, and need not the help of eyes to describe it."

"And then," continued she, "I see you both. I see my mother's dear face, tender as it was when first my eyes opened to the light of its love—And, my father, I see you with the same frown that terrified me in the concert-room—the same scowl that to my frightened fancy, seemed that of some mocking fiend who sought to drive me back to blindness! What is it father? What has changed you so that you love your child no longer, and seek to take the new life that God has just bestowed?"

"God has bestowed nothing upon you, and I will no longer be the tool of an imposter," replied he morosely. "Am I to be the laughing stock of Vienna, while men of distinction see through the tricks of the charlatan? I must and will have the strength to confess my folly, and to admit that you are blind."

Therese uttered a cry, and shook as though a chill had seized her. "Oh God, help me!" murmured the poor girl, sinking in her mother's outstretched arms, and weeping piteously. Suddenly she raised her head and gradually her face brightened, her cheeks flushed, her lips parted with a smile, and her large expressive eyes beamed with happiness.

Once more she trembled—but with joy, and leaning her head upon her mother's shoulder, she whispered, "He comes."

The door opened, and Mesmer's tall and commanding figure advanced towards the group. Therese flew to meet him and grasped his hands in hers.

"Come, Master, come and shield me! God be thanked, you are here to shelter me. If you leave again I shall lose my sight."

He passed his hands lightly over her face, and looked earnestly into her eyes.

"You are dissatisfied with me Master," said she anxiously. "You are displeased at my childish behaviour. I know that I was silly; but when I saw these multitudinous heads so close together, all with eyes that were fixed on me alone, I began again to feel afraid of my own race. It seemed as if the walls were advancing to meet me—and I retreated in terror."

"What confused you at the harpsichord, child?"

"The sight of the small, dazzling notes, and the singular motions of my own fingers. I am so unaccustomed to see, that hands and notes appeared to be dancing a mad *Morrisco*, until at last I grew confused and saw nothing."

"All this is so natural," said Mesmer sadly, "for the seat of your infirmity lay in the nerves. And now that they require rest, you are a prey to agitation and to tears! Unhappy Therese, there are some who seek to plunge you back into the darkness from whence I have rescued you!"

She put her arms upon his shoulders and sobbed, "save me, Master, save me—I could not bear blindness now!"

At the other end of the room stood Von Paradies and his wife. She laid her hand upon his arm, saying imploringly,

"What signifies all this mystery, husband? Why do you torture our little Therese so cruelly? You know that she sees, why then do you——"

"Peace!" interrupted Von Paradies angrily. "If Therese does not become blind again, we shall lose our pension."

"My poor child," sobbed the mother, "you are lost!"

"I have come to your help Therese," said Mesmer audibly. "I know all that is passing under this roof," continued he, with a look of scorn at her parents. "They are trying to deprive you of your sight, and they well know that excitement and weeping will destroy it. But my name and honor are linked with your fortunes, child, and I shall struggle for both. I have come to take you to the villa with my other patients. You shall be under my wife's care, and will remain with us until your eyes are fortified against nervous impressions. The carriage is at the door."

"I am ready to go," replied Therese, joyfully.

"I will not suffer her to leave the house!" cried Von Paradies striding angrily forward. "Therese is my daughter, and shall not be torn from her father's protection."

"She goes with me," thundered Mesmer with eyes that flashed lightning, like those of Olympian Zeus. "You gave her to me as a patient, and until she is cured she belongs to her physician."

He took Therese in his arms and carried her towards the door. But Von Paradies, with a roar like that of some wild animal, placed himself before it and defended the passage.

"Let me pass," cried he.

"Go—but first put down Therese."

"No—You shall not deprive her of the sight I have bestowed."

With these words, he raised his muscular right arm, and swinging off Von Paradies as if he had been a child, Mesmer passed the opening and stood outside.

"Farewell, and fear nothing," cried he, "for your pension will not be withdrawn. Therese is once more blind. But as God is just, I will restore her again to sight!"

Mesmer, however, was destined to be foiled. His enemies were richer and more influential than he; and Von Paradies, in mortal terror for his pension, sustained them. Van Stork obtained an order, commanding the relinquishment of Therese to her natural guardians, and her father armed with the document, went and demanded his daughter. Therese flew to Mesmer's arms, and a fearful scene ensued. It shall be described in Mesmer's own words.

"The father of Therese, resolved to carry her away by main force, rushed upon me with an unsheathed sword. I succeeded in disarming him, but the mother and daughter both fell insensible at my feet: the former from terror, the latter because her unnatural father had hurled her against the wall, where she had struck her head with such violence as to lose all consciousness. Madam Von Paradies recovered and went home, but poor Therese was in a state of such nervous agony that she lost her sight entirely. I trembled for her life and reason. Having no desire to revenge myself upon her parents, I did all that I could to save her life.

"Herr Von Paradies, sustained by those who had instigated him, filled Vienna with the cry of persecution. I became an object of universal contumely, and a second order was obtained by which I was commanded to deliver Therese to her father."*

From this time Therese remained blind, and continued to give Concerts in Vienna, as she had done before. Barthe and his accomplices were triumphant, and Mesmer, disgusted with his countrymen, left Vienna, and made his home in Paris.

Therese Von Paradies then, as her father asserted, was blind. Whether she ever was anything else remains to this day an open question. The faculty denied furiously that she had seen: Mesmer's friends on the contrary declared solemnly that she had been restored by animal magnetism, but that her cruel father, for the sake of the pension, had persecuted her and so succeeded in destroying her eye-sight forever.

* Justinus Kerner. Franz Anthony Mesmer. P. 70.

MARIE ANTOINETTE.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LE ROI EST MORT, VIVE LE ROI!

It was the evening of the tenth of May, 1774. The Palace of Versailles, the seat of royal splendor, was gloomy, silent and empty. Regality, erst so pleasure-loving and voluptuous, now lay with crown all dim, and purple all stained, awaiting the last sigh of an old expiring King, whose demise was to restore to it an inheritance of youth, beauty and strength.

In one wing of the Palace; royalty hovered over a youthful pair, as the genius of hope; in another, it frowned upon the weak old King as the implacable angel of death.

Louis the Fifteenth was balancing the great account of his life: a life of luxury, voluptuousness, and supreme selfishness. Yielding to the entreaties of his daughters, he had sent for the Archbishop of Paris; but knowing perfectly well that the sacraments of the Church would not be administered under a roof which was polluted by the presence of Dubarry, the old libertine had banished her to the chateau de Ruelles.

But Monseigneur de Beaumont required something more than this of the royal sinner. He exacted that he should make public confession of his scandalous life in presence of the Court to which he had given such shameful example. The King had struggled against such open humiliation, but the Archbishop was firm, and the fear of death predominating over pride, Louis had consented to make the sacrifice.

For three days the Courtiers had hung about the ante-room, afraid to enter, (for the King's disease was small-pox;) yet afraid to take flight lest by some chance he should recover. But now the doors of the royal apartments were flung wide open, and there was great trepidation among the crowd. The Archbishop in his canonicals was seen standing by the bed of state; on one side of him stood the Grand Almoner, and on the other the Minister, the Duc d'Arguillon. At the foot of the bed knelt the daughters of the King, who in soft whispers were trying to comfort their miserable father.

"The King wishes to bid adieu to his friends!" cried the Duc d'Arguillon in a loud voice.

Here was a dilemma! Everybody was afraid of the small-pox, for the handsome Marquis de Letorières, whom Louis had insisted upon seeing, had just died of the infection, and nobody desired to follow him. And yet the King *might* outlive this attack, and then——what?

Once more the Duc d'Arguillon called out for the King's friends; and, trembling from apprehension of results that might follow this latter contingency, they entered the chamber of death. The atmosphere was fearful. Not all the fumes of the incense, which was sending its vapory wreaths to the pictured ceilings, could overpower the odour of approaching dissolution. In vain the acolytes swung their golden censers—Death was there, and the scent of the grave.

Breathless, and with compressed lips, the King's friends listened to his indistinct mutterings, and looked upon his swollen, livid, blackened face. Each one had hurried by, and now they all were free again, and were preparing to fly as far as possible from the infected spot. But the clear, solemn voice of the Archbishop—that voice which so often had stricken terror to their worldly hearts, was heard again, and he bade them stay.

"The King asks pardon of his subjects for the wicked and scandalous life which he has led on earth," said the Archbishop. "Although as a man, he is responsible to God alone for his deeds, as a sovereign he acknowledges to his subjects that he heartily repents of his wickedness, and desires to live only that he may do penance for the past, and make amends for the future."

A piteous groan escaped from the lips of the dying monarch, but his "friends" did not stay to hear it; they fled precipitately from the frightful scene.

While here, a trembling soul was being driven from its earthly dwelling, in another wing of the palace, the other members of the royal family were in the chapel at prayer. The evening services were over, and the chaplain was reading the "Forty hours' prayer," when the sky became suddenly obscured; peal upon peal of thunder resounded along the heavens, and night enveloped the chapel in its dismal pall of black. Livid flashes of lightning lit up the pale faces of the royal supplicants, while to every faltering prayer that fell from their lips, the answer came from above in the roar of the angry thunder clap.

There before the altar knelt the doomed pair, the innocent heirs of a selfish and luxurious race of Kings, whose sins were to be visited upon their unconscious heads. No wonder they wept—no wonder they shuddered on this dark and stormy night which heralded their reign.

The rites were ended, and the Dauphin and Dauphiness went silently together to their apartments. The few trusty attendants who were gathered in the ante-room, greeted them with faint smiles, and uttered silent orisons in their behalf; for who could help compassionating these two young creatures, upon whose inexperienced heads the thorny crown of royalty was so soon to be placed?

As they entered the door, a flash of lightning that seemed like the fire

which smote the guilty cities of Israel, flashed athwart their paths, and the thunder cracked and rattled above the roof, as though it had been riving that palace-dome asunder. The Dauphiness cried out, and clung to her husband's arm. He, scarcely less appalled, stood motionless on the threshold.

The violence of the wind at that moment had burst open some outer door. The lights in the chandeliers were almost extinguished, and one solitary wax-light, that had been burning in the recess of a window, went entirely out. Regardless of etiquette, and of the presence of the royal pair, Monsieur de Campan sprang to the chandelier, and re-lighting the candle, quickly replaced it in the window.

The Dauphin beheld the act with astonishment, for no one at that court was more observant of decorum than Monsieur de Campan.

"What means that light in the window?" inquired the Dauphin, in his clear, touching voice.

"Pardon me, your Highness, it is merely a ceremony," replied Monsieur de Campan, confused.

"What ceremony?" asked the Dauphin, with surprise.

"Your Highness commands me?"

"I request you—if the Dauphiness permits," said Louis, turning to his wife, who almost exhausted, leant for support against him, and bowed her head.

"Your Majesty has given orders that as soon as the event, which is about to take place, has occurred, the whole court shall leave Versailles for Choisy. Now it would not be possible to issue verbal orders in such a moment as the one which we await; so that the Master of the Horse and myself had agreed upon a signal by which the matter could be arranged without speech. The *Guardes du corps*, pages, equerries, coaches, coachmen and out-riders, are all assembled in the court-yard, their eyes fixed upon this light. As soon as it is extinguished, it will be understood that the moment has arrived when the court is to leave Versailles.

"The disappearance of the light then, will communicate the tidings of the King's death?"

Monsieur de Campan bowed. Louis drew his wife hurriedly forward, and passed into another room, where, with his hands folded behind him, he walked to and fro.

"God is just," murmured he to himself, "and there is retribution in Heaven."

Marie Antoinette, whose large violet eyes had followed her husband's motions, raised them to his face with a look of inquiry. She rose from the divan on which she was sitting, and putting her small, white hand upon the Dauphin's shoulder, said,

"What do you mean, Louis?"

"I mean that this solitary light, for whose disappearance these people are waiting, shines in retribution for the fearful death-bed of my father."

"I do not understand."

"No, Antoinette, how should you? You have never heard the tragic story of my father's death, have you?"

"No, my husband," said she, tenderly, "tell it to me now."

"I will, Antoinette. He was one of the best and truest hearts that ever lived, and yet these selfish courtiers all forsook him in his dying hour. He lay alone and abandoned in his room by all save my angelic mother, who nursed him as loving woman alone can nurse. The court was at Fontainebleau, and the Dauphin's father announced that as soon as his son had expired, they would all journey to Choisey. My father, who in an arm-chair, was inhaling, for the last time, the balmy breath of Spring, saw these hurried preparations for departure from the open window where he sat. He saw carriages, horses, trunks, lackeys and equerries ready at a moment's warning to move. He saw that the signal for the rushing crowd to depart, was to be his death. Turning to his physician, he said, with a sad smile, "I must not be too long in dying, for these people are becoming impatient."*

"Shameful!" cried Marie Antoinette, wiping away her tears.

"Aye, more than shameful!" exclaimed Louis. "Now, you see, that the hour of retribution has come, for once more the court grows impatient with the length of a dying sovereign's agony. Oh, would that my noble father were alive! How much more worthy was he to be a King than I."

"From my heart I echo your wish," said Antoinette, fervently. "How was it that he died so young?"

Louis looked searchingly at the face of his young wife. "He died of a malady whose name is an impeachment of the honor of those who survive him," said the Dauphin, sternly, "and my mother died of the same disease.† But let us not throw any darker shadows over the gloom of this heavy hour. I am stifled—I have a presentiment of——"

A loud shout interrupted the Dauphin. It came nearer and nearer, and now it reached the ante-room where the crowding courtiers were pouring in to greet King Louis XVI.

The Dauphin and his wife were at no loss to understand these shouts. They exchanged glances of fear, and side by side, they fell upon their knees, while, with tear-streaming eyes, they faltered: "Oh, God have mercy upon us, we are so young to reign!"‡

The doors were thrown open, and the Mistress of Ceremonies of Marie Antoinette appeared. Behind her came a multitude of lords and ladies, their curious eyes peering at what they had never expected to see—a royal couple assuming the purple, not with pomp and pride, but with humility, distrust and prayer.

They rose and faced their subjects. Madame de Noailles curtsied so low that she was upon her knees.

* Soulavie: *Memoires, etc.*, vol. 1.

† It was generally believed that the Dauphin and his wife were poisoned by a political party, whose leader was the Duc de Choiseul. The royal couple belonged to the anti-Austrian party.—*Memoires de Campan*. Vol. 1, page 78.

‡ *Memoires de Campan*. Vol. 1, page 78.

"Your Majesties will forgive this intrusion," said she, with all the *aplomb* of her dignity. "I come to request that your Majesties will repair to the State reception-room to receive the congratulations of your royal relatives and those of your court, who are all awaiting anxiously to do you homage."

Such a request from the lips of Madame de Noailles, was the exaction of an indispensable form of court etiquette, which the young couple dared not evade.

Arm in arm they went, Marie Antoinette hiding her tears with her handkerchief, and looking inexpressibly lovely in her childish emotions, while the loud greetings of a magnificent court hailed her as their Queen.

While the consorts of the royal Princes folded their sister-in-law in their arms, the Princes, with courtly decorum, bowed ceremoniously before the King.

"Permit us, sire," began the Count of Provence, "to be the first to lay our homage at your Majesty's feet, and to ——"

"My brothers, my brothers!" cried Louis, deeply affected, "is my crown to rob me of the dear ties of kindred? Oh, do not call me King, for I cannot afford to lose the dear companions of my childhood."

"Sire," replied the Count of Provence, "you shall not lose them; and for us, our gain is two-fold. We receive from God a gracious King, and retain our much-loved brother." And the Count embraced the King, who had opened his arms to receive him.

A quarter of an hour later, the Chateau of Versailles was deserted. The courtiers, pages, equerries and lackeys, had all departed, delighted to leave that infected atmosphere, within whose poisonous influence the iron rules of etiquette had detained them while Louis XV. lived. None of them felt inclined to do homage to departed royalty. Even the Duke de Villequier, first gentleman of the bed-chamber, in his terror, forgot etiquette, and instead of watching the King's corpse, he too, made ready to go with the rest.

"Monsieur," said the Duke to Andouillé, the King's physician, "I leave you that you may be able to open and embalm the body."

Andouillé grew pale, for he knew perfectly well that the performance of such a ceremony as that, was his death-warrant. However, after a pause, he replied, "I am ready, your Grace, but you must remain to hold the King's head. It is, as you know, a part of your duty as gentleman of the bed-chamber."*

The Duc de Villequier said nothing. He merely bowed and hurried from the room. Andouillé followed his example, but more considerate than the other attendants of the King, he made some provision for the deserted corpse. He sent for one of the subordinates of the palace, and ordered him to watch by the body. Then, going to his carriage, he saw several hod-men lounging about, who were carrying mortar for some repairs that were being made on the palace. The physician called

them, and bade them go tell the lord-steward that the King's coffin must be saturated with spirits of wine, and his winding-sheet also.

Such were the preparations that were made for the obsequies of the defunct King; and his body was watched by a few servants and these hod-men whom Andouillé had employed as messengers.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE MEMORANDA.

It was early in the morning. The court had accompanied the King and Queen to Choisy, and thither had flocked the representatives of every class in Paris, to do homage to the King and wish him a prosperous reign.

The people seemed wild with joy, and nobody vouchsafed a thought to the memory of the "*Bien-aimé*," whose body was even now being taken to its last rest, in the vaults of St. Denis. The funeral train was anything but imposing. The coffin, placed upon a large hunting wagon, was followed by two carriages, containing the Duc d'Ayen, the Duc d'Aumont, and two Priests. Twenty pages and as many grooms closed the procession, which went along without attracting the notice of anybody. The burial service was read in the crypt and the coffin hastily lowered in the vault, which was not only walled up, but cemented also, for fear the infection imprisoned within, might escape from the dungeon of the dead, and infest the abodes of the living.

Not one of the royal family had followed the body. The King was at Choisy, and all hearts were turned to him. Thousands of men went in and out of the palace, each one with his burthen of fears, hopes, uneasiness or expectations. Who now was to find favor at court? Would it be the Queen or the aunts of the King? What fate awaited Dubarry? Who would be Prime Minister?

While these matters were being discussed without, the King, who had not yet made his appearance, was in his cabinet. His disordered mien, tangled hair, and red eyes, as well as the lights that still flickered in the chandeliers, showed plainly that he had not been to bed that night.

He could not sleep. The future lowered dark and threatening before him, and day had not brought comfort to his anxious mind. Great drops of sweat stood upon his brow, and his face, never at the best of times handsome, to-day was less attractive than ever.

"I am so young," thought he, despondently. "I know of no man at this court, in whose honesty I can confide. Every man of them has

curried favor with that shameless woman, whose presence has defiled the throne of my ancestors, and disgraced the declining years of my grand-father. To whom shall I turn? Who will give counsel to a poor inexperienced youth?"

A slight knock was heard at the door. The King rose and opened it.

"Monsieur de Nicolai," said Louis, surprised, as the old man stood before him with head inclined. "What brings you to me?"

"The will of your deceased father, sire."

The King stepped back and motioned him to enter. "Now speak," said he. "I know that you were with my father on his death-bed; and I have often sought to win your friendship, but until now have sought in vain."

"Sire, I was afraid that if I betrayed an interest in your Majesty, I might not be allowed to live long enough to fulfil the trust confided to me by your father. I had sworn, that on the day you ascended the throne of France, I would deliver his will to your Majesty."

"And you have preserved it? You have brought it to me?"

"Sire, here it is," said the old nobleman, taking from his breast a sealed package, and laying it in the King's hands.

Louis grasped it eagerly, and deeply moved, read the address. "Papers to be delivered to which ever one of my sons ascends the throne of France."

"Your Majesty sees that I have kept my trust," said de Nicolai.

"Oh, why is not my father here to reign in my stead!" exclaimed Louis.

"He died, sire, that he might be spared the sight of the disgrace which has overtaken France. He died that the world might bear witness to the baseness of those who, since his death, have swayed the destinies of France. He did not die in vain. Your Majesty's self will profit by his martyrdom."

"Yes, I have heard of it all. I know the invisible hand that dealt the death-blow to my father, my mother, and my grand-mother. I know it and ——"

"Sire, your Majesty's father forgave his enemies, and through me he prays your Majesty to do likewise."

"I will obey," said Louis, inclining his head, "and leave the guilty to the vengeance of Heaven."

"And now, sire, that my mission is accomplished, allow me to retire, and let me entreat you to lay your father's words to heart."

"I will do so, I promise you. Can I do aught to serve you?"

"No, your Majesty, I have nothing to ask of man."

The King gave him his hand, and followed him with wistful eyes until the door had closed behind him.

"Oh, how beggard seems a King, when he has nothing wherewith to recognize the loyalty and love of his friends," thought Louis, with a weary sigh.

He took up the packet and read: "Treaty concluded between Louis

XV. and Maria Theresa, on the 1st of May, 1756. Arguments to prove that sooner or later, the Austrian alliance will be an injury to France."

The King turned over the pages and read the following:

"Whichever one of my sons is called to the throne of Louis XV. let him hearken to the warning of his father. Beware, my son, of entanglements with Austria. Never seek the hand of an Austrian princess, for marriages with Austria have brought no blessing to France."

The King sighed heavily, and his head sank upon his breast. "Too late—too late, my father! My fate is decided!" And Louis took up the second memorandum.

"List of persons whom I recommend to my son, the King of France."

"Ah!—this is the guide I was seeking. Let me see. First,—Monsieur de Maurepas—a statesman who has steadily opposed the policy advocated by La Pompadour.' That is well—I shall recall him from banishment. 'Messieurs de Machault, de Nivernois, de Muy Perigord, de Broglie, d'Estaing,' and others—all men of honor. How far-sighted was my father, in recommending these men! They are the very nobles who have kept aloof from the late King's mistresses. With one exception. I adopt the list; but there is one among them, who stooped to be a flatterer of Dubarry. The Duc d'Aiguillon is certainly a statesman, but he cannot be of my ministry."

Here the King paused, perplexed to know who should be appointed in d'Aiguillon's place. Suddenly his face brightened, and he rose from his chair,

"Marie Antoinette," thought he. I will advise with her. Though we may not love one another, we are friendly, and she has a right to my confidence. Besides, she is intelligent and principled."

Here the King took up his memoranda, and prepared to seek his wife. He had gotten as far as the door, when his expression changed again, and his face once more wore a look of blank despondency. With a grieved and perplexed mind, he returned to the table.

"No, no," sighed he, falling back into his chair, "that will never do. She is an Austrian, and her policy would be in direct opposition to that of my father."

For sometime the poor young King sat in profound discouragement. Finally, with a long, weary sigh, he raised his head, and began to reflect again. At last he solved the difficult problem.

"Ah!—I have it now," thought he, heartily relieved. "I will go to Madame Adelaide. She was my mother's dearest friend, and my father's favorite sister. She shall be my counsellor. I believe, that with her assistance, I may succeed in carrying out the policy dictated by my father."

He gathered up his papers, and went into the ante-room, where he ordered a page to go to Madame Adelaide, and say "that the King would visit her if she could conveniently receive him."*

* Madam Adelaide, an anti-Austrian, and, therefore, one of the Queen's enemies, was, throughout his whole reign, the counsellor of her nephew.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FRANCE AND AUSTRIA.

WHILE the King was closetted with Madame Adelaide, the Queen, on her side, was receiving her royal household. This ceremony over, she had gladly retired to the privacy of her own room, there to restore order to her confused mind. But her rest was not of long duration, for presently came Monsieur de Campan to announce the visit of the Austrian Ambassador.

The Queen received him most cordially; rising from her seat and advancing a few steps to meet him. Madame de Noailles, who conforming to etiquette, had entered with Monsieur de Campan, and was to remain in the room during the interview, was shocked at the Queen, and frowned visibly.

Marie Antoinette paid no attention to her. She reached her hand to Count Von Mercy and allowed him to press it to his lips. Again Madame de Noailles was horror-stricken. The kissing of the Queen's hand was a state ceremonial, and was inadmissible in private.

The Queen had forgotten the existence of her Mistress of Ceremonies. With sparkling eyes and beaming smiles, she greeted the old Count, who, to her, was the representative of all that she loved—her mother, her sisters, and her native country.

"Have you news for me from Vienna, Count?" said she, in a voice whose tones were strikingly like those of her mother.

"I bring to your Majesty letters of condolence and of congratulation from the Empress and the Emperor."

"Why you must be a conjurer, Count. Our reign is not twenty-four hours old yet, and you bring us congratulations from Vienna!"

"I will explain, your Majesty," said the old Count, with a smile. "You remember that more than a week ago, the King lay in a stupor, which, for some hours, was supposed to be death. During this stupor my courier started for Vienna, and the messenger sent after him, to stop the despatches, arrived too late. The answers had been sent, and these are the congratulatory letters."

The Count handed his papers, and as the Queen cast down her beautiful eyes to read the address, she exclaimed, joyfully, "My mother's handwriting and my brother's!"

She broke the seal of the Empress's letter, and her countenance fell.

"Nothing but official papers," said she, sighing, and putting them on the table. "I know the contents of Joseph's letter, without reading it. Have you no news for me from Vienna? Think of something to tell me from home, dear Count."

Count Von Mercy cast a stolen glance at the Mistress of Ceremonies, who, stiff and watchful, stood close by the side of the Queen's chair.—Marie Antoinette understood the look.

"Madame de Noailles," said she, turning with a smile to address her, "you will not, I hope, think me rude, if I request you to allow me a few moments interview with Count Von Mercy. He has something to say to me that is of a strictly confidential nature."

The Mistress of Ceremonies did not appear to have heard a word of this address. Marie Antoinette reddened and threw back her head. "I request Madame de Noailles," repeated she, changing her tone, "to retire into the reception-room. I wish to speak with Count Von Mercy alone."

"I must be permitted to say that your Majesty's request cannot be granted," replied Madame de Noailles. "No Queen of France is permitted to receive a foreign ambassador otherwise than in the presence of the court. I shall have to ask his Majesty's pardon for a breach of decorum which I was too late to prevent—the reception of the ambassador here with myself alone to witness the interview."

The Queen's eyes flashed with anger as she listened to this presumptuous language.

"You will have to ask pardon of no one but myself, Madame, for your unseemly language to your sovereign."

"Excuse me, your Majesty, I perform my duty, and this requires of me to see that no one here commits any breach of court etiquette. The laws of etiquette are as binding upon the Queen as upon her subjects, and she cannot infringe them."

"I announce to you, Madame, that no laws of yours shall be binding upon me. The Queen of France is here to make laws, not to receive them; and, for the last time, I command you to quit this room, and to leave me alone with the representative of my imperial mother."

Madame de Noailles made a deep curtsy and backed out of the room. Marie Antoinette looked after her until the last traces of her long train had vanished, and the silk *portière* had fallen in its place.

"Ah!" said she, taking a long breath, "at last I have gained a victory. It is now my turn to lecture, and Madame has received her first scolding. Well, Count, now that she is fairly off, what have you to tell me from Vienna?"

Count Von Mercy looked towards the door, and having convinced himself that it was well closed, he drew from his pocket a package and presented it to the Queen.

Marie Antoinette hastily tore open the seals, and began to read. "Oh," said she, with a disappointed look, "this is no private letter. It is nothing but a letter of instructions, directing me how to win the King's confidence, so as to influence his policy and secure a new ally to Austria. The Empress need not remind me that I must look to the interests of the House of Hapsburg. The Queen of France will never forget that she is the daughter of Maria Theresa, and she will do all in her power to promote an alliance between France and Austria. Tell

ny mother that I will never cease to be her subject, and that her interests shall always be mine. And now for the other mission."

"Good heavens!" cried she, after opening the letter, "more politics." She looked down the page and read: "Personages whom I recommend as suitable for the counsellors and household of the King." This was quite a long list in the Empress's handwriting, and at its head stood the name of the Duc de Choiseul. "The Queen of France must use every effort to secure his appointment as minister, for he is sincerely attached to us."

Many other distinguished names were there; but not one of those which had been mentioned by the King's father.

"I will preserve this paper with care," said Marie Antoinette, burying her letters deep in her pocket. "No doubt you know their contents, Count. A postscript says, 'Consult frequently with Mercy;,' so let us begin at once."

"Will your Majesty not read the letter of the Emperor?"

"Why should I read it now? It grieves me to see these political documents from the hands of dear relatives who ought to write to me of home and love. I will put it with the official letter of the Empress for the King to read."

"Pardon me your Majesty, but I do not think it official."

"Read it for me then," said the Queen, throwing herself back in the deep recesses of her arm-chair. "I have confidence enough in you to be willing that you shall see my brother's letter should it even be a private one."

Count Von Mercy bowed and unfolded the letter, which was as follows:

"Madam. I congratulate you upon your husband's accession to the throne of France. He will repair the faults of his predecessor's reign, and win the love of his people. The French nation has groaned under the inflictions of a king, who not only proscribed parliament but entrusted every office of state to his favorites. He banished deChoiseul, Malesherbes and Chalotais; and in their stead elevated the Maupeous, the d'Arguillons, and that hateful Abbot Terray, who for rapacity were none of them better than Dubarry; and thus he ended by losing the love of his subjects. I have often pitied Louis XV. for degrading himself as he did before the eyes of his family, his subjects, and the world.

"Unite your efforts to those of your husband that you may win the love of the French nation. Leave no stone unturned to secure their affections, for by so doing you will prove a blessing to your people."

"Strengthen our alliance with France, and apply yourself to the mission for which you were educated—that of peace-maker between two of the most important powers of Europe.

"I kiss your hands, and remain, with the highest esteem and consideration, your Majesty's friend and brother,
JOSEPH."*

"You are right, Count," said the Queen, as the ambassador concluded

* Letters of Joseph 2d, as characteristic contributions, &c. P. 20.

his reading. "This is no official document, but a most significant letter of instructions. I am expected to preserve peace between France and Austria. Ah! I fear that I am not calculated to walk the slippery arena of politics, and I confess to you that I feel in nowise drawn towards it. It does seem to me that a Queen of nineteen may be pardoned if she feels some desire to enjoy life. I intend to begin by breaking the fetters which have hitherto made such wretched puppets of the Queens of France; and before long you will see the workings of my Court Revolution. But there is one thing near to my heart which you must assist me to compass. The Duc deChoiseul must be Minister of Foreign Affairs. I know that he desires it, and I am under obligations to him which deserve some return. I owe it to him that I am Queen of France. Now if I succeed in elevating Choiseul to the ministry," continued the Queen with an appealing smile, "I hope that Austria will be satisfied, and will allow me to retire from the field. The Duc deChoiseul will be a much abler auxiliary than I, near the King; we must therefore have him recalled."

"The Duke arrived in Paris from Chanteloup this morning, but does not think it advisable to present himself until he receives a message from the King."

"I will see that the message is sent," said Marie Antoinette, confidently. "The King will not refuse me, I know. You shrug your shoulders, Count. Do you think it doubtful?"

"Your Majesty condescends to speak confidentially with me," said the Count, seriously. "I am an old servant of your house and my hair has grown gray in its service. In consideration then of the deep affection which I have ever felt for your Majesty, will you allow me to speak with you frankly?"

"I implore you, Count, to do so."

"Then your Majesty, let me warn you to be careful. Things do not work at this French Court as they ought to do. Your Majesty has bitter enemies, who await an opportunity to declare themselves openly. The Count of Provence and the aunts of the King are at their head, and believe me, they are watchful spies."

"Oh my God," cried the poor young Queen, "what have I done to earn their enmity?"

"You are an Austrian Princess, and that suffices for them. Your marriage was a victory over the anti-Austrian party for which the Duc deChoiseul will never be forgiven; and as for yourself, if you give them the opportunity, they will not scruple to take revenge upon your own royal person. The Count of Provence has a sharp tongue, and his aunts and himself will spare no means to wound or to injure you. Therefore pardon me if again I bid you beware of your enemies. There is Madame deNoailles, for instance, she belongs to the most powerful families in France, and the French nation regard her as the palladium of the Queen's honor. Your Majesty cannot afford to offend her. It would be a great misfortune for you, if she should resign her office, for her resignation

would place on the list of your enemies all the most influential nobles in France."

"Is that all?" asked the Queen with a painful blush.

"Yes, your Majesty, and I thank you for your condescension in listening so long."

"Then hear me," said Marie Antoinette, rising and standing proudly before him. "You tell me that I have enemies. Be it so, and may God forgive them! But it were unworthy the daughter of Maria Theresa to stoop to conciliate them. With visor raised, and front exposed, I stand before them. My blameless life shall be my defence, for I will so live that all France shall be my champions. As for Madame de Noailles, I will make no concessions to her. My virtue needs no more protection from etiquette than that of any other woman. Heretofore the Queens of France have been nothing but *Marionettes* in the hands of their high-born duennas. I intend to transform the puppets into women, whom the French nation can love and esteem; for I wish my people to know that their Queen's virtue is not a thing of form, but the veritable overflowing of a heart aspiring to perfection."

"Right royally spoken!" said a soft voice behind, and the Queen starting, beheld the King, who having opened the door quietly, had heard her last words.

CHAPTER L.

THE KING'S LIST.

MARIE ANTOINETTE, with a happy smile, gave her hand to her husband. He raised it to his lips and kissed it so fervently that his young wife blushed with pleasure.

"Do you know what brings me to you, Antoinette?" said he gaily. "The deadly anxiety of good Madam Etiquette. She met me in the ante-room and confessed that she had been guilty of the crime of leaving the Queen alone with a foreign ambassador. To relieve her mind I promised to come hither myself and put an end to the treason that was hatching between France and Austria."

"Ah!" said Marie Antoinette, with a bewitching pout, "then you came, not to see me, but to save Madam Etiquette a fit of the vapors."

"I made use of her as a pretext to intrude myself upon you," said the King, with embarrassment.

"Oh, your Majesty well knows that you need no pretext to come in my presence!" said Marie Antoinette, eagerly.

"Certainly I require it just now, for I have broken up a charming *tête-à-tête*," said the King, bowing to Von Mercy.

"The Count has brought me letters from the Empress," said Marie Antoinette. "And what do you suppose they were? Congratulations upon our accession to the throne."

The King smiled, but expressed no surprise.

"What, you are not surprised?" said the Queen. "Do you take the Count for a sorcerer?"

"I take him for a true and loyal friend of his sovereign," said Louis, "and I only wish that I possessed one as faithful. But I am not at all astonished to hear of the congratulations, since the courier started off with the news a week ago."

"Your Majesty knew it then?"

"A King must know all things," said he, gravely. "Are you not of my opinion, Count? Is it not proper that a sovereign should possess a knowledge of every important letter which comes into his kingdom or leaves it?"

"I believe so, your Majesty," replied the Count, somewhat confused.

"I am convinced of it, and so is the Empress of Austria," said the King, with a laugh. "She is admirably well posted in all that concerns foreign courts, and not a document leaves the French Embassy in Vienna, of which she has not a copy. Is it not so, Count Von Mercy?"

"I do not believe, sire, that there is any person in the French Embassy capable of betraying the interests of his country or of revealing its secrets."

"Then change your creed, Count, for in every country there are men open to bribery. But," continued he, turning to the Queen, "we have wandered from our subject—your Majesty's letters from Vienna. Have you good news?"

"It is mere official, sire," replied the Queen, handing the letter to the King.

Louis looked it over; then replacing it upon the table, said, "And the other letters?"

"Which other letters?" asked the Queen.

"Did you not tell me there were several?"

"No, sire," replied the Queen, reddening.

"What fabels men do invent!" exclaimed the King. "A courier has just arrived from the French Embassy, in Vienna, with despatches informing us that Count Von Mercy had received, for your Majesty, one official letter from the Empress, and two private letters of instruction, one of which contained a list of persons recommended by her Majesty; and finally, a fourth missive, private, from the Emperor Joseph. And all this is pure invention, Count Von Mercy?"

"It is, your Majesty," said the Count, with much embarrassment, while Marie Antoinette cast down her eyes and blushed.

The King enjoyed their confusion for awhile; he seemed to take

pleasure in this first triumph of his regal power, and a smile flitted over his rather clumsy features.

"You see then," continued he, "that I have received false intelligence and it is evident that Austrians are less corrupt than Frenchmen, for I am told that count Von Mercy and Prince Kaunitz are *au fait* to everything that transpires in the palace here. Be that as it may, we intend to follow the example of the Queen. Our policy shall be so frank and honorable that all the world may know it and welcome. But—it occurs to me that the Mistress of Ceremonies is in great anguish of mind. She will not recover her equanimity until she sees you again, Count."

"In that case, your Majesty, I will beg leave to retire, replied the Count.

The King bowed, and the Queen gave him her hand.

As the Count was about to raise the *portière*, the King called him back. "Do you send a courier to Vienna to-day?" asked his Majesty.

"Yes, sire, in one hour."

"Then let me impart to you a secret, which I think will interest her imperial Majesty, of Austria—my new ministry."

"How! has your Majesty already chosen them?" asked Marie Antoinette, anxiously.

The King nodded. "It was my first sacred duty to seek guides for my inexperience, and I have chosen ministers who are able statesmen, and have already served before."

The Queen's eyes brightened, and even Count Von Mercy seemed surprised and pleased.

"Do, your Majesty, let us have their names," said Marie Antoinette.

"First, Monsieur de Maurepas."

The Queen uttered an exclamation. "The Minister of the Régency, who has been banished for forty years!"

"The same. He was a friend of my father. He will be Prime Minister, and as I am so unfortunate as to have to bear the weight of royalty at twenty years, I have taken care to select old and experienced men as my counsellors."

"And who is to succeed the Duc d'Aiguillon?" cried Marie Antoinette, "for I presume that your Majesty intends to give him his dismissal."

"I would be glad to retain him as my minister," said the King, pointedly, "for his policy is identical with mine. He has the interests of France at heart, and has never suffered himself to be led away by foreign influence. But unluckely, he was too intimate with Dubarry, and on this ground, I shall dismiss him."

"And his successor?" asked the Queen, scarcely able to restrain her bitter disappointment.

"His successor is the Count de Vergennes."

"De Vergennes?" cried the Queen, scornfully. "He, who married a slave in Constantinople."

"Ah, you have heard that ridiculous story which was invented by

Monsieur de Choiseul? Nobody here ever believed it; and let me tell you that the Countess de Vergennes, enjoys the esteem and consideration of all who know her. Vergennes, himself, is a man of talent, and will do me good service. The other ministers are: for the War Department, Count de Mury; for the Minister of Finance, instead of that hateful Abbott, of Terray—(was not that the Emperor's expression?)—I have chosen Count de Clugny."

"Count de Clugny!" said Marie Antoinette, again beginning to hope. "Does your Majesty mean the friend of the Duc de Choiseul?"

"Himself, madam," said the King, coolly. "And while you are speaking of Monsieur de Choiseul, I am reminded that this is not the first time his name has been mentioned to-day. You, Count Von Mercy, are a friend of his—I am not. You can, therefore, tell me whether it is true that he has left Chanteloap, whither the deceased King had banished him."

"Yes, sire, the Duc de Choiseul arrived this morning in Paris."

"What can he want in Paris?" asked the King, with an unconscious look. "Why did he leave Chanteloap? It seems to me that for the man who is so lucky as to have a landed estate, this is the very time of year to stay there. You had better advise your friend to return to the country. And now, Count, you know all that I have to tell, and I will detain you no longer. Madame de Noailles must be in despair. Comfort her by informing her that you left the Queen of France in the company of her husband."

CHAPTER LI.

THE FIRST PASQUINADE.

THE Court had left Choisy for the Chateau de la Maette, near Paris. Here the Queen was to hold her first public levee, and her subjects longed to appear before her, for the Parisians were enthusiastic admirers of grace and beauty. Marie Antoinette had won their hearts by refusing to accept the tax called "*La ceinture de la rein.*" This tax was the perquisite of the Queen of France on her accession to the throne.—But having discovered that the nobles had managed to evade it and cast the burden of taxation upon the poor, Marie Antoinette had requested her husband's leave to relinquish her right to it. Like wildfire the news of the young queen's generosity spread throughout Paris; and in all the streets, *cafés*, and *cabarets*, the people were singing this couplet:

“Vous renoncez charmante souveraine,
 Au plus beau de vos revenus;
 A quoi vous servirait la ceinture de reine,
 Vous avez celle de Venus.”

They sang, they shouted, and made merry, happy in the possession of a young King and a beautiful Queen, casting never a thought towards him, who, years before, had been surnamed “*Le Bien-aimé*.”*

One speculating jeweller, alone, honored the memory of the deceased King, and made his fortune thereby. He manufactured a mourning snuff-box, of black shagreen, whose lid was ornamented with a portrait of the Queen. He called his boxes “*La consolation dans le chagrin*,”† and his portrait and his pun became so popular that in less than a week he had sold a hundred thousand of these boxes. Louis, also, had his share of the national good-will.‡

He renounced the box called “*Le joyeux asenement*”; and to commemorate the act, another snuff-box made its appearance in Paris as a *pendant* to the “*Consolation in Grief*.” The King’s box contained the portraits of Louis XII. and Henry IV. Below these, was his own likeness, with the following inscription; “*Les pères du peuple, XII. et IV. font XVI.*” These boxes were as popular as those of the Queen, and Louis and Marie Antoinette were the idols of the Parisians.

“Long live the King!” was the cry from morn till night. Hope brightened every eye, and reigned in every heart. The people dreamed of peace, happiness and plenty, and the fashions symbolised their state of mind. The women dressed their heads with ears of wheat, and ate their *dragées* from cornucopias. The men poured out their enthusiasm in sonnets and addresses, and everything in France was *couleur de rose*.

Couleur de rose—with one exception. The anti-Austrian party frowned, and plotted, and hated. Exasperated by the enthusiasm which the beautiful young Queen inspired, they watched her every motion, eager to magnify the most trivial imperfection into crime, hoping, sooner or later, to render her obnoxious to the French people, and finally, to compass the end of all their wicked intrigues—a separation between the King and Queen, and the disgrace and banishment of Marie Antoinette to Austria.

It was the day of the grand reception at La Muette, where every lady having a right to appear at court, might come uninvited and be presented to the Queen. The great Throne-room was prepared for the occasion, and although its decorations were black, they were tastefully enlivened with white and silver. The throne, itself, was covered with black velvet, trimmed with silver fringe. Hundreds of ladies thronged the room, all with their eyes fixed upon the door through which the Queen and her court must make their entrance.

* Memoires de Weber. Vol. 1, p. 43.

† Memoires de Mme. de Campan. Vol. 1, page 91.

‡ This word “*chagrin*,” signifies not only grief, but also that preparation of leather, which, in English, is called “*Shagreen*.” Hence the pun.

The folding doors were thrown wide open; and announced by her mistress of ceremonies, Marie Antoinette appeared.

A murmur of admiration was heard among the crowd. Never had the Queen looked so transcendantly lovely as she did to-day in her dress of deep mourning. She seemed to feel the solemnity of her position as Queen-consort of a great nation, and the expression of her face was tranquil and dignified. No woman ever represented royalty with better grace than Marie Antoinette, and the old coquettes of the Regency and of the corrupt Court of Louis XV, were awed by her stateliness. They could not but confess that they were in the presence of a noble and virtuous woman: therefore they disliked her, whispering one to the other, "What an actress!"

Marie Antoinette took her seat upon the throne. On her right and left were the royal family, and behind them the ladies of the Court. Opposite stood Madame de Noailles, whose duty it was to present those who were unknown to the Queen.

The presentation began. Forth in their high-heeled shoes came the noble-born widows, who, old and faded, were loath to forget that in the days of the Regency they had been blooming like the Queen, and who, in happy ignorance of their crows' feet and wrinkles, were decked in the self-same costumes which once had set off their roses and dimples.

It was a ludicrous sight—these ugly old women, with their jewels and patches—their extraordinary head-dresses—and their deep, deep curtsies, painful by reason of the aching bones of three-score and ten. The young Princesses dared not raise their eyes to these representatives of by-gone coquetry, for they were afraid to commit a crime—they were afraid that they might laugh. But the ladies of honor, safe behind the hoops of the Queen and her sisters-in-law, made merry over the magnificent old ruins. Madame de Noailles was so busy with the front that she overlooked the rear, where the lively young Marquise de Charente Tounerre, tired of standing, had glided down and seated herself comfortably on the floor. Neither could she see that the Marquise, in the exuberance of her youthful spirits, was pulling the other ladies by their skirts, and amusing them with mimicry of the venerable coquettes before mentioned; so that while etiquette and ceremony were parading their ugliness in front of the throne, behind it youth and beauty were tittering and enjoying the absurd pageant in utter thoughtlessness of all consequences.

The mistress of ceremonies was in the act of presenting one of the oldest, most shrivelled, and most elaborately dressed of the ancients, when the Queen, attracted by the whispering behind, turned her head in the direction of her ladies of honor. There on the floor, sat the Marquise de Charente Tounerre, imitating every gesture of the old *Comtesse*; while around her, the others, including the Princesses themselves, were pursing up their lips, and smothering their laughter behind handkerchiefs and fans. The drolleries of the Marquise were too much for the Queen. She turned away in terror lest they should infect her with untimely le-

vity, and just at that moment the *Comtesse* made precisely such a curtsy as the Marquise was making behind her.

Marie Antoinette felt that her dignity was departing. She struggled to recall it, but in vain; and instead of the stately inclination which it was her duty to return, she suddenly opened her fan to hide the mirth which she was unable to control.

The gesture was seen not only by the austere mistress of ceremonies, but by the *Comtesse* herself who, furious at the insult looked daggers at the Queen, and omitting her third curtsy, swept indignantly to her place.

A short pause ensued. Madame de Noailles was so shocked that she forgot to give the signal for another presentation. The Queen's face was still buried under her fan, and the Princesses had followed her example. Discontent was manifest upon the countenances of all present, and the lady whose turn it was to advance, did so with visible reluctance.

Marie Antoinette recovered her self-possession, and looked with perfect serenity towards the high and mighty Duchess whose titles were being pompously enumerated by the punctilious mistress of ceremonies. As ill-luck would have it, this one was older, uglier, and more strangely bedizened than all the others together. The Queen felt a spasmodic twitch of her face; she colored violently, and opening her fan again, it was evident to all that assemblage of censorious dames that for the second time, youth and animal spirits had prevailed over decorum.

In vain Marie Antoinette sought to repair the *contretems*. In vain she went among them with her sweetest smiles and most gracious words. Their outraged grandeur was not to be appeased—she had offended beyond forgiveness.

The Areopagus sent forth its fiat. The Queen was a frivolous woman—she had that worst of failings—a taste for satire. She despised all conventions, and trampled all etiquette under foot.

On that day the number of her enemies was increased by more than a hundred persons, who attacked her with tongues sharper than two-edged swords. The first thrust was given her on the morning that followed the reception; and the same people who a few days before, had been singing her praises on the Pont-neuf, were equally, if not better pleased with the ballad of "*La Reine mocqueuse*," of which the cruel *refrain* was as follows:

" Petite reine de vingt ans
 Vous qui traitez si mal les gens,
 Vous repasserez la barriere
 Laire, laire, laire, lanlaire, lanla."*

* *Memoires de Mme. de Campan*, Vol. 1, P. 90-91.

CHAPTER LII.

THE NEW FASHIONS.

THE Queen had submitted to a state of things which she felt to be irremediable. She had renounced all idea of interceding with the King for de Choiseul, for she felt that interference on her part would be resented, and she could not afford to lessen, by so much as a shade, the kindly feelings which her husband had begun to manifest towards her.

Louis appeared to have no greater happiness than that which he found in his wife's society. They were often seen wandering in the shady walks of the palace-gardens, talking, jesting and laughing together, as might have done any other young couple, unencumbered by the burden of royalty. It had even happened to Louis to steal an arm around the graceful form of the Queen, and once or twice to bestow a shy kiss upon her ivory shoulders.

The heart of the King was thawing, and Marie Antoinette, who had so longed and pined for his regard, sometimes blushed, while with beating heart, she indulged a hope that the King was falling in love.

She sought, by every means in her power, to please him, and she, who hitherto, had seemed indifferent to dress, now bestowed hours of thought upon the toilet of the day.

The anti-Austrian party, the royal aunts, the brothers of the King, and the Orleans family, all her enemies, observed this new taste for dress with secret satisfaction. Not one of them suspected that it was aimed at the heart of the King, and that Marie Antoinette, whom they were deriding as a coquette, was coquetting with her husband, and dressing for him alone. So they flattered and encouraged her, hoping to divert her mind from politics and urge her on to ruin.

The Duchess of Chartres had mentioned to the Queen a Parisian *modiste*, who had instituted a complete revolution in dress. This wonderful *modiste*, whose taste in modes was exquisite, was Mademoiselle Bertin. The Duchess had described her dresses, laces, caps, and coiffures, with so much enthusiasm, that Marie Antoinette grew impatient with curiosity, ordered her carriage and sent a message to Madame de Noailles to prepare to accompany her at once to Bertin's establishment.

Madame received this message with indignation, and instead of making ready to obey, went in hot haste to the Queen's reception-room.

"I wish to drive to Bertin's to make some purchases," said Marie Antoinette, as her tormentor appeared at the door.

"That is impossible, your Majesty," said the guardian of the *Inferno* of etiquette. "No Queen of France has ever set foot within the pre-

cinets of a shop, or has ever appeared in a public place of that sort. It would be such an egregious breach of etiquette that I am convinced your Majesty will not be guilty of it."

"Well, said the Queen, with a scornful laugh, "I will not disturb your virtuous convictions. I will *not* be guilty of that which no Queen of France has ever stooped to do, so that you can have Bertin sent to the palace, and I will examine her goods here."

"Here! Your Majesty would receive a *modiste* in your reception room!" cried de Noailles, rolling up the whites of her eyes. "I beseech your Majesty to remember that none but the noble ladies, who have the privilege of the *Tabouret*, are allowed to enter the Queen's reception-room."

The Queen bit her rosy lips. "Well, then, Madame," said she, "I will receive Bertin in my own cabinet. I presume there can be no objections to that, and if there were, I should certainly not heed them."

"The duty of my office, nevertheless, obliges me to remark to your

"There is no office at this court which justifies any one in a direct disobedience of the Queen's orders. Go, then, Madame, and order that Bertin be sent to me in an hour."

"Oh!" murmured Marie Antoinette, as the Mistress of Ceremonies slowly retreated, "that woman's sole delight in life is to irritate and annoy me!"

An hour later Mademoiselle Bertin made her appearance before the Queen. Four royal lackeys followed her, laden with band-boxes.

"Mademoiselle," said the Queen, "have you brought me the latest fashions?"

"No, your Majesty," replied Bertin, reverentially, "I bring the materials wherewith to fill your Majesty's orders."

"Were you not told to bring your samples of fashions?" asked Marie Antoinette, with surprise.

"Your Majesty, there are no new fashions," said Bertin. "Your Majesty's word is necessary to create them. A Queen does not follow the fashion, it follows her."

"Ah! you intend that I shall invent new fashions?"

"Yes, your Majesty. The Queen of France cannot stoop to wear that which has already been worn by others."

"You are right," said the Queen, pleased by the flattery of the shrewd *modiste*. "Make haste, and show me your goods, that I may begin at once to set the fashions to the court. It will be quite an amusement to invent new modes of dress."

Mademoiselle Bertin smiled, and opening her boxes, exhibited her goods. There were the beautiful silken fabrics of Lyons; the shimmering white satin, besprinkled with boquets, that rivalled nature; there were heavy, shining velvets, heightened by embroidery of gold and silver; laces, from Alençon and Valenciennes, whose web was as delicate as though elfish fingers had spun the threads; muslins, from India, so

fine that they could only be woven in water; crapes, from China, with the softness of satin and the sheen of velvet; there were graceful Ostrich plumes, from Africa, and flowers from Paris, so wondrous in their beauty, that nothing was wanting to their perfection save perfume.

Marie Antoinette flitted from one treasure to another, her white hands at one moment deriving new beauty from the dark velvets upon which they rested; at another, looking lovelier than ever, as they toyed with the transparent laces. There was nothing queenly about her now. She was merely a charming woman, anxious to out-shine all other women in the eyes of one man.

When Mademoiselle Bertin took her leave, the Queen gave her orders to return to the palace daily. "One thing I shall exact of you, Mademoiselle, you shall disclose the secret of my toilet for the day to nobody; and the fashions shall be made public at the end of one week."

Mademoiselle Bertin, with a solemnity befitting the importance of her office, swore that henceforth the hands which had been honored by carrying out the ideas of a Queen, should never work for lesser mortals; that her dresses would be made with closed doors, and that she would rather be led to execution than betray to a living soul the mysteries of her royal patroness's toilet.*

CHAPTER LIII.

THE TEMPLE OF ETIQUETTE.

THE hour for the Queen's toilet was one of ravishment to Madame de Noailles, for it was a daily glorification of that etiquette which she worshipped, and which Marie Antoinette abhorred. In that hour, the chains were on her hands and feet. She could neither breathe, speak, nor move, but in the narrow limits of its weary exactions.

The Queen's toilet then, was Madame de Noailles' triumph, and she always made her appearance in the dressing-room with an air of supreme satisfaction.

The first lady of honor poured the water into the golden basin, and Marie Antoinette, who at least had the privilege of washing her own hands, stood patiently waiting until the towel had been passed by a lady of the bed-chamber to the same lady of honor who had poured out the water. The latter, on one knee, gave the towel, and the Queen wiped her hands.

* Mademoiselle Bertin, from that day, became an important personage, and received many a rich present from noble ladies anxious to imitate the Queen in dress.

The second act of the royal toilet began at the solemn moment when the Queen changed her richly embroidered night-chemise for the simpler one she wore during the day. This changing of garments was a sublime ceremonial, not only in the Queen's dressing-room, but also in that of the King. At the King's great levee, none but a Prince of the blood had the right to reach him his shirt. By the lesser levee, the nobleman whom the King wished to honor, was called upon to fill this high office; and the enviable mortal, thus honored, remained near the King's person for the whole day; was entitled to dine at the royal table, and had a seat in the King's hunting-wagon.

Now, at the toilet of the Queen, the ceremonial was different, and, as in all such matters, more onerous for the woman than for the man. The honor of presenting the chemise devolved upon the lady present, whose rank was the highest.

On the particular day to which we allude, it was the privilege of Madame de Noailles. Marie Antoinette had allowed her night-dress to slip from her shoulders, and stood, bared to the waist, awaiting the pleasure of her Mistress of Ceremonies. She crossed her beautiful arms and bent her head in readiness to receive the chemise, which the lady of the bed-chamber was in the act of passing to Madame de Noailles.

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and the Duchess of Orleans entered the room. A triumphant smile lit up the face of Madame Etiquette, for now the ceremony would be prolonged. It was no longer her duty, it was that of the Duchess to wait upon the Queen.—But the proud Countess de Noailles could not condescend to pass the garment to the Duchess. That was the duty of the aforesaid lady of the bed-chamber. The Mistress of Ceremonies motioned her to approach, and the Duchess began to draw off her gloves.

Meanwhile, Marie Antoinette, with folded arms, stood beautiful as one of Dean's nymphs, but very uncomfortable in her beauty; for she was beginning to grow chilly and her teeth chattered. At last the preparations were made, and the Duchess advanced with the coveted garment.

Suddenly she stopped, and stood perfectly still. She had heard the voice of "Madame," the Countess of Provence, and it would have been an unpardonable sin for the Duchess of Orleans to deprive a Princess of the blood, of handing the chemise to the Queen.

The door opened, and the sister-in-law of Marie Antoinette came in. The Duchess retreated—Madame de Noailles approached slowly and relieved her of the chemise, and with unflinching deliberation, again gave it into the hands of the lady of the bed-chamber.

And there stood the Queen, shivering and waiting. Scarlet with shame and anger, though trembling from head to foot, she murmured resentful words against her tormentors. The Princess saw it all, and hastened to her relief. Without stopping to remove her gloves, she took the chemise, and advancing, in great haste, to throw it over the

Queen's head, she struck against her high *toupet* and disarranged the head-dress.

"Oh, my dear sister," said the Queen, laughing, "my hair will have to be dressed anew."

Madame de Noailles drew down her eye-brows, as she was accustomed to do when irritated by indecorum, and motioned to the second lady of the bed-chamber to put on the Queen's shoes. The royal toilet now went on more smoothly, and was completed according to form. This done, it became the duty of the victim to pass into her reception-room, attended by her ladies. Madame de Noailles had opened the door and stood before it like a she-Cerberus waiting for her prey to pass within, when the Queen, still laughing at her disordered *coiffure*, threw herself into a chair before her cheval-glass, and said,

"I hope, Madame, that etiquette does not require of the Queen of France to appear before her court with dishevelled hair. If I may be permitted to express a preference in the matter, I would like to have my hair in order."

Madame de Noailles closed the door, and turned stiffly to the first lady of the bed-chamber.

"Oh, no," said Marie Antoinette, "I will not trouble my good Madame de Campan to-day. Did my Secretary fetch my hair-dresser from Paris?"

"Yes, your Majesty," said a lady in waiting, "the hair-dresser is in the outer room."

"Go and call him, de Campan. And now ladies," said Marie Antoinette, to the Princesses, "you shall see one of the demi-gods. Leonard is called in the world of fashion "*le dieu des coiffures*."

"Leonard!" exclaimed Madam de Noailles. "And has your Majesty then forgotten that the Queen is not permitted to be waited upon by any but womanly hands?"

"The Queen not *permitted!*" echoed Marie Antoinette, proudly. "We shall see whether the Queen of France asks permission of her subjects to employ a male or female hair-dresser!"

The door opened, and the discussion was stopped by the entrance of Madame de Campan with Leonard.

"Now, ladies," continued the Queen, "be so good as to await me in the reception-room." As she saw that the prim lips of de Noailles were about to be opened, she added: "the Mistress of Ceremonies and Ladies of the Bed Chamber will remain."

Leonard's skilful hands were soon at work, loosening the Queen's hair; and it glistened, as it fell, like glimmering gold. He surveyed it with such looks of enthusiasm as a statuary might bestow upon the spotless block of marble, from whence he will fashion ere long, the statue of a goddess.

Marie Antoinette, from the mirror, saw his complacent face, and smiled. "What style do you intend to adopt for me?" asked she.

"The *coiffure à la Marie Antoinette*," said Leonard.

"I have never seen it."

Here Leonard sank the subject and became the artist. His head went proudly back with a look of conscious power.

"Your Majesty must not think me so barren of invention that I should deck the head of my Queen with a *coiffure* that has been seen before by mortal eyes."

"Then you are about to invent a *coiffure*?"

"If it please your Majesty—if your Majesty will condescend to leave its fashion to the inspiration of my genius."

"Follow your inspiration by all means," said the Queen, highly amused, and Leonard began his work. A long, solemn pause ensued, and all eyes were strained to see the result. He combed the Queen's hair over a trellis of fine wire, then he introduced two down cushions, which he had brought in his band-box, and after he had built him a tower of a foot high, he took a long breath and surveyed the structure. Then he glanced at the toilet-table where lay a mass of flowers, feathers and laces, which Bertin had left.

"May I be allowed to select from these?" asked he.

The Queen nodded, and Leonard chose a bunch of white ostrich feathers, which he prepared to place in her head.

"Feathers!" cried Marie Antoinette. "You surely are not going to put feathers in my hair!"

"Pardon me, your Majesty," said Leonard, with an air of supreme wisdom, "if I beg you to allow me to complete my *coiffure*, before you decide upon its merits." And he went to work to fasten the feathers in his tower.

"This is really becoming," said the Queen, not reflecting that her beautiful face with its lofty brow and exquisite contour, could bear any abomination with which Leonard chose to invest it.

"I adopt the feathers," said she, "and allow you to call the *coiffure* after me. Poor ostriches, they will not thank me! You are, from this day, in my service Monsieur Leonard, and my steward will assign you your apartments."

Leonard bowed with the dignity of an artist who feels that in the favor of his sovereign he has his merited reward.

"Come every morning at this hour, and every evening at seven o'clock," said Marie Antoinette. "Meanwhile, you are at liberty to dress the hair of as many ladies as you choose."

"Pardon me, your Majesty," interposed Madame de Noailles. "An old immutable regulation of the French court forbids any person employed by the royal family to serve a subject; and the *coiffeur* of the Queen cannot be allowed to dress the hair of any lady in France."

"Nevertheless, I give him permission to dress as many heads as he pleases when he is not in attendance upon myself. What is the use of a man's taste and talent, if it is all to be wasted on one monotonous employment? Let Monsieur Leonard exercise his ingenuity upon different styles of women, that he may have scope for his imagination."

The Mistress of Ceremonies sighed, and opened the door. Marie Antoinette approached it gaily, for she was all anxiety to test the effect of her *coiffure* upon the ladies in waiting.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE NEW FASHIONS AND THEIR UNHAPPY RESULTS.

A universal murmur of surprise and admiration was heard among the ladies, when the Queen appeared in the reception-room. The Countess of Provence could scarcely retain her discontent as she surveyed the magnificent costume of her beautiful sister-in-law.

For a few moments the Queen enjoyed the pleasure of being sincerely admired. Then, advancing to the Princess, she took her hand and said, "oblige me, dear sister, by dining with the King and myself *en famille*.. Let us have a social meal together to-day."

"Certainly, your Majesty, I will do so with pleasure, but what you are pleased to call a family-dinner will lose all its charm through the curiosity of your Majesty's admirers, who come from Paris, from Versailles, and from all the ends of the earth, to look at the royal family taking their dinner."

"Not at all," said the Queen, eagerly. "I look upon this daily exhibition as a tyrannical custom, which must be abolished. It is too hard that we cannot have our meals in private, but must be gazed at like animals, and denied the privilege of confidential intercourse. I have submitted to be stared at for four years, but the Queen is not to be ruled as the Dauphiness has been. We shall dine to-day *en famille*, and from this time the public have access to our dining-room no more."

"That is delightful news," answered the Princess, "but I pity the good people who are coming in expectation of seeing your Majesty at table."

"They will return to their homes," said the Queen, slightly raising her shoulders, "and when they reflect coolly on the subject, they will certainly not think less of me because I prefer to dine like the rest of the world. I believe that if we desire popularity with the people, we must show them that we have feeling hearts like themselves, and it is by such means that I hope to gain the love of the French nation.

The Princess was secretly vexed at the honesty and purity of the Queen's motives, but she forced a smile, and replied: "You have already succeeded in doing so; for the French people adore you, and if they could only see you to-day in that *piquant* head-dress, they would

verify the saying of the Mayor of Paris, 'Your Majesty beholds in us a hundred thousand lovers.'

Marie Antoinette laughed. "Quite a respectable army," said she, slightly blushing, "but to complete its worth it must be commanded by the King. How surprised he will be to see us dining in private."

"His Majesty has not been consulted?"

"It is a surprise which I have in store for him. He has often bewailed this stupid custom, but dared not complain for fear of remarks. I am less timid than he, and I am about to give you a proof of the same."

"Madame de Noailles," added she, aloud, "inform the ushers that while the royal family are at dinner, no strangers will be admitted to the dining-room. The privilege of entrance shall cease from to-day."

The Countess had been awaiting her opportunity to speak.

"Your Majesty," said she, with an expression of painful anxiety, "I entreat of you not to revoke that privilege! Believe me, when I tell you, that it is dangerous to interfere with customs which are so old that the people have grown to look upon them as rights. Ever since the days of Francis I., the royal family has dined in public, and every decently clad person has enjoyed the privilege of entering the banquet room. Moreover, allow me to observe to your Majesty, that this public meal is an express ceremony of the French court, and it is indispensable to its dignity."

"Etiquette, Madame," replied Marie Antoinette, "is not *made* for sovereigns but *regulated* by them. You speak of the people's rights; allow me to claim something for mine. It has ever been the habit of Kings and Queens to give commands, not to receive them. Let me, therefore, advise you to strike out from your code of etiquette the rule which obliges us to dine in public, and to insert in its stead, the following: 'On days of festivals or of public rejoicing, the people will be admitted to the King's dining-room.' And now, sister, let us take a turn in the park."

So saying, the Queen took the arm of the Princess, and followed by the ladies in waiting, they went out upon the terrace. Madame de Noailles remained behind, in the large, empty reception-room. Her face was pale and troubled, and she leaned despondently against the high back of an arm-chair near that from which the Queen had just risen.

"Royalty totters on its throne!" murmured she, in a low voice.— "This woman's bold hand is shaking the pillars of her own temple, and when it falls it will bury both King and Queen under its fragments. She laughs at etiquette as ridiculous despotism; she does not know that it is the halo which renders her sacred in the eyes of the people. I see the tempest lowering," continued the Mistress of Ceremonies, after a thoughtful pause. "The Queen is surrounded by enemies whom she defies, and those who would be her friends she alienates by her haughtiness. In the innocence of her thoughtless heart, what unhappy precedents has she established this day. They are the dragon's teeth, that will grow armed men to destroy their sower. She despises conventions,

and braves old customs. She does not know how dearly she will pay for her milliner, her hair-dresser, and her dinners in private! I have done my duty. I have warned and remonstrated, and will continue to do so as long as my patience and honor can endure the humiliations to which I am exposed—but no longer! By the heaven that hears me—no longer!”

The Countess was right. The apparently trifling incidents of the day were fraught with mournful consequences to the Queen. Heretofore, she had been remarked for her simplicity of dress: from the introduction of Bertin and Leonard into her household she dressed with rare magnificence. Not only the ladies of the court, but those of the city, followed her extravagance at a distance. They must wear the same jewels, the same flowers, the same costly silks and laces. Ostrich feathers became the rage, and they were soon so scarce that fabulous prices were paid to import them for the use of the French women.

The *trousseau* of a young beauty became as important as her dowry. Mothers and husbands sighed, and at last ended by abusing the Queen. It was she who had set the example of this wasteful luxury in dress, she who had bewitched all the women, so that they had gone mad for a feather or flower. Strife was in every house. Parents were at variance with their children, marriages were broken off through the exactions of the brides, and on all sides, the blame of everybody's domestic troubles fell upon the shoulders of the Queen.*

CHAPTER LV.

SUN RISE.

THE court had now moved to Marly. Each day brought its varieties of sports, and the palace became the very shine of pleasure. Even the King, fascinated by his wife's grace and gayety, lost his awkward bearing, and became a devoted lover. He was ready to gratify every whim of hers, without ever inquiring whether it was consistent with the dignity and station of a queen. True, all her whims were innocent in themselves, but some of them were childish, and therefore, inappropriate to her position.

The King grew so bold that he paid graceful compliments to the Queen on the subject of her beauty; and in the exuberance of his young, gushing love, he went beyond his courtiers in felicity of expression, so that

* Madame Campan, *Memoires*, etc. Vol. 1, page 96.

finally he became more eloquent than d'Artois, more impassioned than de Chartres, and more piquant than de Rovence.

Marie Antoinette beheld this transformation with rapture, and her little innocent coquetteries with the Princes and noblemen of the Court had but one aim—that of heightening the effect of her charms upon her royal husband.

“One of these days,” thought she, “he will learn to love me. I await this day as nature throughout her dark winter nights awaits the rising of the glorious sun. Oh how happy will I be when the morning of my wedded love has dawned!”

“But,”—added she, interrupting herself and smiling, “what a simpleton I am with my smiles—like a blind man enraptured with a color! I talk of sunrise, I—who am such a barbarian that I never saw the sun rise in my life!—And to think that the French are so fond of comparing me to the rising sun! I think I had better make acquaintance with the original of which I heard so often that I am the copy!”

So the Queen, full of a new idea, sent for the Countess de Noailles.

“Madame,” said she, “can you tell me at what hour the sun rises?”

“When the *sun* rises!” exclaimed Madame, who had hardly ever taken the trouble to remember that the sun rose at all.

“Yes Madame, I wish to know at what hour the sun rises, and I hope there is nothing in your code of etiquette that forbids the Queen of France to aspire to a knowledge of that very common-place fact.”

“I regret, your Majesty that I cannot enlighten you, for I have never felt any interest in the matter. But if you will allow me, I will make the necessary inquiries.”

“Do so, if you please, Madame.”

Madame de Noailles was absent for some time. At last she returned.

“Pardon me your Majesty that I have been away so long. But no one in the palace could give me the information I sought, luckily in passing one of the corridors, I met a gardener coming in with fresh flowers for your Majesty’s cabinet, and he was able to tell me. The sun rises at present, at three o’clock.”

“Thank you. Be so good as to make your arrangements accordingly. I shall get up at three o’clock to-morrow morning and go out upon the hillock in the garden to see the dawn of day.”

“Your Majesty would go out into the garden at three o’clock in the morning?” said Madame, almost fainting with horror.

“Yes Madame,” said Marie Antoinette with decision. “Is there any law in France to forbid me a sight of the sun at that hour?”

“No, your Majesty,” for such an extraordinary demand could never have been pre-supposed. Since France was a Kingdom, no Queen of France has ever been known to indulge a wish to see the sun rise.”

“Unhappy Queens! I suppose they were so profoundly engaged in the study of your favorite code that they had no time to admire the works of God. But you see that I am an eccentric Queen, and I would go in all humility to adore Him through one of his glorious works. And

as luckily for me, Etiquette has never legislated upon the subject, you have no grounds for objection, and I shall commit the astounding indiscretion of going out to see the sun rise."

"Still, your Majesty must allow me to say that for all extraordinary cases not provided for, in the code of Etiquette, the Queen must have the consent of the King."

"Do not concern yourself about that; I shall express my desire to the King, and that will suffice. My ladies in waiting who keep Diaries can then note with quiet consciences that on this day the Queen of France, with the consent of her husband, went into the garden to see the sun rise?"

Marie Antoinette slightly inclined her head, and passed into her dressing-room, there to put herself into the hands of Monsieur Leonard. The skilful hair-dresser was in his happiest vein; and when he had achieved the great labor of his day, the Queen was inexpressibly charming.

Conformably to her wishes, many irksome Court-customs had been laid aside at Marly. The strict lines of demarcation between royalty and nobility no longer hampered the daily intercourse of the sovereigns and their subjects. The lords and ladies in waiting were at liberty to join the Queen's circle in the drawing-rooms, or to group themselves together as inclination prompted—Some talked over the events of the day, some discussed the new books which lay in heaps upon a table in one of the *salons*—others again played billiards with the King.

To-day the Court was assembled in an apartment opening into the garden, and the Queen, who had just made her appearance, in all the splendor of her regal beauty, was the cynosure of attraction and of admiration. She stood in the centre of the room, her eyes fixed wistfully upon the setting sun, whose dying rays were flooding park, terrace, and even the spot on which she stood, with a red and golden light. By her side stood the King, his mild countenance illumined with joy and admiration of his young wife's surpassing loveliness. On the other side of the Queen were the Princes and Princesses of the blood; and around the royal group an assemblage of the youngest, prettiest and sprightliest women of the aristocracy, escorted by their cavaliers, young nobles whose rank, worth, and culture, entitled them to all the favor which they enjoyed at court. At the head of the wits were the Count de Provence, the Count d'Artois, and their kinsman, the Duke de Chartres, known years afterwards as "Philippe Egalite." De Chartres and the witty Duke de Lauzun were among the most enthusiastic admirers of the Queen.

The French court was in the zenith of its splendor. Youth and beauty were the rule,—age was the exception; and in the *salons* of Marie Antoinette, its solitary representative frowned through the deep and angry furrows that dented the wrinkled visage of Madame de Noailles.

To-day the high-priestess of etiquette had taken advantage of the liberty allowed to all, and had absented herself. Her absence was a sensible relief to a court, where no man was older than the King, and many a woman was as young as the Queen.

For a time, Marie Antoinette's glance lingered caressingly upon the garden, through whose perfumed alleys the evening wind was rustling with a sweet, low song. The court, following the mood of the Queen, kept perfectly silent. Of what were they thinking, that crowd of youthful triflers, so many of whom were hurrying to the bloody destiny which made heroes of coxcombs and heroines of coquettes!

Suddenly the expression of the Queen's face, which had been thoughtful and solemn, changed to its usual frankness and gayety. "Ladies and gentlemen," said she, in that clear, rich voice of hers, which always reminded one of little silver bells, "I have a riddle to propose."

"A riddle!" echoed the company, crowding around to hear.

"Yes, a riddle, and woe to those who cannot guess it! They will be sentenced to sit up this whole night long."

"A severe sentence," said the King, with a sigh. "May I not be one of the condemned. Well, then, lovely sphinx, tell us your riddle."

"Listen all!" said Marie Antoinette, "and strain your every faculty to its solution. Princes and Princesses, lords and ladies, can you tell me at what hour the sun will rise to-morrow?"

The perplexed company looked at one another. Everybody seemed puzzled except the King. He, alone, smiled and watched the countenances of the others.

"Come, gentlemen, you who are fed on the sciences—come ladies, you so expert to guess—will none of you solve my riddle?" cried the lively Queen. "You, brother Philip, who knows all things, have you never asked this question of the sun?"

"I interest myself, dear sister, in matters which concern myself, my family and France," replied the Count de Provence, not over-pleased at the appeal. "The sun, which belongs to another world, has no share in my studies or my meditations."

"Condemned," said the Queen, with a merry laugh. "No sleep for you to-night. And you, brother d'Artois, who are such a devotee of beauty, have you never worshipped at the shrine of solar magnificence?"

"The sun rose in this room, your Majesty, about a quarter of an hour ago," said Count d'Artois, bowing. "I can, therefore, safely say that in the Chateau of Marly, it usually rises at eight o'clock."

"Compliments will not save you, d'Artois; you shall not go to sleep this night. And what say you, my sisters-in-law and our dear Elizabeth?"

"Oh, we dare not be wiser than our husbands!" said the Countess de Provence, quickly.

"Then, you shall share their fate," returned Marie Antoinette. "And now," continued she, cousin de Chartres, it is said that your merry-making sometimes last until morning. You must, then, be intimately acquainted with the habits of the rising sun."

"*Ma foi*," said the Duke, with a careless laugh, "your Majesty is right. My vigils are frequent, but if returning from thence, I have ever met with the sun, I have mistaken it for a street-lantern, and have never given a second thought to the matter."

"Nobody, then, in this aristocratic assemblage, knows aught about the rising of the sun," said the Queen.

A profound silence greeted the remark. The Queen's face grew pensive, and gradually deepened into sadness.

"Ah!" exclaimed she, with a sigh, "what egotists we are in high-life. We expect heaven to shield and sustain us in our grandeur, and never a thought do we return to heaven."

"Am I not to be allowed the privilege of guessing, Madame?" asked the King.

"You, sire!" said Marie Antoinette. "It does not become the King's subjects to put questions to him, which he might not be able to answer."

"Nevertheless, I request your Majesty to give me a trial."

"Very well, sire. Can you read my riddle and tell me at what hour the sun will rise to-morrow?"

"Yes, your Majesty. The sun will rise at three o'clock," said Louis, with a triumphant smile.

Everybody wondered. Marie Antoinette laughed her silvery laugh, and clapped her little white hands with joy. "Bravo, bravo, my royal Oedipus!" cried she, gaily. "The Sphinx is overcome; but she will not throw herself into the sea just yet. She is too happy to bend the knee before her husband's erudition."

With bewitching grace, the Queen inclined her beautiful head and knelt before the King. But Louis, blushing with gratification, clasped her hands in his, and raised her tenderly to her feet.

"Madam," said he, "if I had the tact and wit of my brother Charles, I would say that the sun, which so lately has risen, must not set so soon upon its worshippers. But answer me one question—what is the meaning of the riddle with which your Majesty has been entertaining us?"

"May I answer with another question? Tell me, sire, have you ever seen the sun rise?"

"I? No, your Majesty. I confess that I never have."

"And you, ladies and gentlemen?"

"I can answer for all that they have not," laughed d'Artois.

"Now, sire," said the Queen, again addressing her husband, "tell me one thing. Is it unseemly for a Queen of France to see the sun rise?"

"Certainly not," answered the King, laughing heartily.

"Then will your Majesty allow me to enjoy that privilege?"

"It seems to me, Madame, that you have no consent to ask save that of your own bright eyes. If they promise to remain open all night, you have no one to consult on the subject but yourself."

"I thank your Majesty," said the Queen. "And now, as none of the company were able to solve my riddle, all must prepare to sit up with me. May I hope, sire, that you will be magnanimous enough to relinquish the right you have earned to retire, and to afford me the happiness of your presence also?"

Louis looked quite discomfited, and was about to stammer out some awkward reply, when the Marshal of the Household threw open the

doors of the banquet-hall, and approaching the King, cried out, "*Le Roi est servi.*"

"Ah!" said he, much relieved, "let us refresh ourselves for the vigil."

Dinner over, the company promenaded in the gardens for an hour, and then returned to the drawing-room to await the compulsory privilege of seeing the sun rise. Marie Antoinette, with the impatience of a child, was continually going out upon the terrace to see how the night waned; but the moon was up, and the gardens of Marly were bathed in a silver light that was anything but indicative of the dawn of day.

The scene was so calm and lovely, that the young Queen returned to the drawing-room in search of the King, hoping to woe him to the enjoyment of the beautiful Nature, which was elevating her thoughts far above the kingdoms of earth, and peacefully leading her heart to heaven. But the King was nowhere to be seen, and as she was seeking him first in one room, then in another, she met the Count de Provence.

"I am charged, Madame," said he, "with an apology from the King. His Majesty begs that you will pardon him for making use of his right to retire. He hopes that your Majesty will not enjoy your night the less for his absence."*

The Queen colored to her brows, and her expressive face gave token of serious annoyance. She was about to dismiss the company, saying that she had changed her mind, but she remembered that by so doing, she might become the subject of the ridicule of the court. Her pride whispered her to remain, and smothered her instinctive sense of propriety. She looked anxiously around for Madame de Noailles, but on the first occasion, when her advice would have been welcome, she was absent. She had been told that etiquette had nothing to do with the Queen's party of pleasure, and she, like the King, had retired to rest.

Marie Antoinette then motioned to her first Lady of Honor, the Princess de Chimay, and requested her to say to Madame de Noailles that her presence would be required in the drawing-room at two o'clock, when the court would set out for the hill, from whence they would witness the dawn of the morrow.

"It is an unconscionable time coming," yawned the Countess of Provence. "See, my dear sister, the hand of the clock points to midnight. What are we to do in the interim?" asked she, peevishly.

"Propose something to while away the time," said the Queen, smiling.

"Let us depute d'Artois to do it. He is readier at such things than the rest of us," said the Princess.

"Does your Majesty second the proposal?" asked d'Artois.

"I do, with all my heart.

"Then," said the thoughtless Prince, "I propose that we play the most innocent and rollicking of games—blind-man's buff."*

A shout of laughter, in which the young Queen joined, was the response to this proposition.

"I was charged with the duty of relieving the tedium of the court," continued the Prince, gravely, "I once more propose the exciting game of blind-man's buff."

"We are bound to accede," replied the Queen, forgetting her embarrassment of the moment before. "Let us try to recall the happy days of our childhood. Let us play blind-man's buff until the sun rises, and transforms the children of the night once more into earnest and reasoning mortals."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FOLLOWING DAY.

THE Queen was alone in her cabinet, which she had not left since she had seen the sun rise. She had taken cold in the garden, and as a souvenir of the event, had carried home a fever and a cough. But it was not indisposition alone which blanched her cheeks. Something mightier than fever glowed in her flashing eyes, something more painful than malady threw that deadly paleness over her sweet, innocent face. From time to time, she glanced at a paper lying on the table before her, and every time her eye fell upon it, her brow grew darker.

There was a knock at the door. She started—and murmuring, "The King!"—she flung her handkerchief over the papers, and throwing back her head, compelled herself to calmness, while her husband, lifting the silken *portière*, advanced towards the table. She tried to rise, but Louis came hastily to prevent it, saying: "I come to make inquiries concerning your health, but if my presence is to disturb you, I will retire."

"Remain then, sire, I will not rise," said the Queen, with a languid smile.

"Are you still suffering?" said Louis.

"Only from a cold, sire, it will pass away."

"A cold for which you are indebted to the chill night-air. It would appear that the Queens of France, who lived and died without seeing the sun rise, were not so stupid after all."

The Queen gave a searching look at the King's face, and saw that it was disturbed.

"I went with your Majesty's consent."

"I believe that I was wrong to give it," returned he, thoughtfully.—

* This game was frequently played in the courtly circles, and not only in aristocratic houses, but in all social gatherings. It became the fashion. Madame de Genlis, who was fond of scourging the follies of her day, made this fashion the subject of one of her dramas.

"I should have remembered that for a hundred years past, the court of France has been so corrupt that, unhappily, the French nation have lost all faith in chastity and purity of heart. You, Madame, must teach them to distinguish the innocence which has nothing to conceal, from the depravity which has lost all shame. But we must be cautious, and so conduct ourselves, that our actions may be beyond misconstruction."

"Your Majesty wishes me to infer that my harmless desire to behold one of the glorious works of my Maker, has been misinterpreted?" said the Queen, opening her large eyes full upon her husband.

The King avoided her glance. "No, no," said he, with embarrassment, "I speak not of what has been, but of what might be."

"And this most innocent of wishes has inspired your Majesty with these apprehensions?"

"I do not say so, but ——"

"But your Majesty knows that it *is* so," cried the Queen. "It is very generous of you to save my feelings by concealing that which you know must subject me to mortification; but others here are less magnanimous than you, sire. I have already seen the obscene libel to which my pleasure-party has given birth. I have read '*Le lever de l'aurore*.'"

"Who has dared to insult you by the sight of it?" asked Louis, indignantly.

"Oh, sire," said Marie Antoinette, bitterly, "there are always good friends, who are ready to wound us with the weapons of others! I found the lampoon on my table this morning among my letters."

"You shall not be exposed to a repetition of this: Campan shall look over your papers before he presents them."

"Do you think I am likely to find them often, sire? I hope not; but be that as it may, I am not a coward. I have courage to face any amount of calumny; for my heart is pure, and my life will vindicate me."

"It will, indeed," said the King, tenderly, "but you must keep aloof from the poisonous atmosphere of Slander. We must live less among the multitude."

"Ah, sire, how can we keep aloof from those who have the right to be near us?"

The King started, almost imperceptibly, and his anxious glance rested upon his wife's honest, truthful eyes. Removing her handkerchief, she pointed to a paper.

"This is the envelope in which I found '*Le lever de l'aurore*.' The handwriting is disguised, but tell me frankly if you do not recognise it. I do."

"I—really—I may be mistaken,"—began the King, "but——?"

"Nay—you see that is the hand of the Count de Provence, your own brother, sire. He it is who enjoys the cruel satisfaction of having forced this indecent libel upon my notice, and I doubt not, for one moment, that he also is the one who sent it to you."

"Yes, no doubt he did it to warn us, and we must be grateful, and take the warning to our hearts."

The Queen laughed scornfully. "Does your Majesty suppose that these drawings were made with the same benevolent intention?" said she, handing him a second paper. "Look at these indecent caricatures, made still more obnoxious by the vulgar observations attached to them. There is no disguise of his handwriting here, for this was not intended for my eyes."

"Too true," sighed the King, "the drawings and the writing are both my brother's. But who can have sent you these shameful sketches?"

"I told you just now, sire, that there are always people to be found, who stab their friends with borrowed weapons. The drawings were accompanied by a letter, informing me that they were executed in the *salons* of Madame Adelaide, and that the remarks were the joint productions of your Majesty's brother and your aunts."

The King passed his handkerchief over his forehead to dry the heavy drops of sweat that were gathering there, and rose up with the paper in his hand.

"Where is your Majesty going?" asked the Queen.

"To my brother," cried he, indignantly. "I will show him this disgraceful paper, and ask by what right he outrages my wife and his Queen! I will tell him that his actions are those of a traitor and——"

"And when you have told him that, will you punish him as Kings punish traitors?"

The King was silent, and the Queen continued, with a sad smile,

"You could not punish him; for the traitor who outrages the Queen is the brother of the King, and, therefore, he can outrage with impunity."

"He shall not do it with impunity! I will force him to honor and love you."

"Ah, sire, love will not yield to force," said Marie Antoinette, in a tone of anguish. "Were I as pure as an angel, the Count de Provence would hate me for my Austrian birth, and Madame Adelaide would use the *great* influence she possesses over your Majesty to rob me of the *little* favor I am gaining in your sight."

"Oh, Antoinette, do you not feel that my whole heart is yours," said Louis, affectionately. "Believe me, when I say, that it is in the power of no human being to sully your sweet image in my eyes. Do not fear the royal family. I am here to protect you, and soon or late, your worth will overcome their prejudices."

"No, sire, no. Nothing will ever win me their regard. But I am resolved to brave their enmity, satisfied that in the eyes of the world, my conduct and my conscience both will sustain me."

"Your husband, also," said the King, kissing her hand.

"Sire, I hope so," said Marie Antoinette, in a tremulous voice. "And now," continued she, dashing away the tear-drops that were gathering in her eyes, "now give me those caricatures. They have served to

convince your Majesty that I know my enemies and defy them. Their mission is accomplished; let us try to forget their existence."

She took the drawings from his hand, and tearing them to pieces, scattered them over the carpet. The King picked up a few of the fragments.

"Will you allow me to retain these as a souvenir of this hour?" said he, gazing fondly upon her sweet face.

"Certainly, sire."

"But you know that Princes can never receive a gift without returning one. Therefore, do me the favor to accept this. It is paper for paper." He drew from his bosom a little package to which the royal seal was affixed, and Marie Antoinette took it with a glance of surprise.

"What can it be?" said she, as she unfolded it.

He watched her as she read, and thought how beautiful she was, as blushing and smiling, she held out her hand to thank him.

"How, sire," said she, joyfully, "you make me this royal gift?"

"If you will accept it. The Chateau de Trianon is a small estate; but its mistress may at least find it a home where she will have liberty to enjoy Nature, without exciting the malevolence of her enemies. No one can watch you there, Antoinette, for your castle is not large enough to lodge your slanderers. It will scarcely accommodate your friends."

"How can I ever thank you, sire?" said she, in grateful accents. "You have understood my heart, and have gratified its weary longings for occasional solitude. This, then, is my own private domain."

"Certainly."

"And I may rule there without interference from state or etiquette."

"Assuredly. As *châtelaine* of Trianon, you alone will regulate its customs, and all who visit you must submit to your rules."

"And no man can enter my chateau without an invitation?"

"Not even the King, himself."

Marie Antoinette smiled, until the pearls encased within her coral lips, dazzled the royal vision.

"How delightful," said she. "I do not think that the Count of Provence will ever be invited to Trianon."

"Nor I," replied Louis.

"But the King will be so often asked to come, that he will certainly wish he were the Count de Provence. Still he must promise not to come until he receives his invitation."

"I promise, beautiful *châtelaine*."

"And then to come whenever I invite him."

"That I can promise more safely than the other."

"Upon your royal word?"

"Upon my royal word. And thus I seal it with a kiss upon your fair hand."

"Upon my hand only, sire?" asked she, while she turned a cheek whose hue was like the rosy lining of a sea-shell.

Louis accepted the challenge, and pressed so passionate a kiss upon that cheek, that it flushed to a deep, burning crimson, and the Queen's eyes were cast down, till nothing of them was visible except her long, dark lashes.

The royal lover, too, grew very red, and stammered a few inaudible words. Then bowing, awkwardly, he stumbled over an arm-chair, and retreated in dire confusion.

Marie Antoinette looked after her clumsy King with a beating heart.

"Am I indeed to be blest with his love!" thought the poor, young thing. "If I am, I shall be the happiest and most enviable of women."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LAST APPEAL.

THE carriage of the Countess Esterhazy was returning from a ball which the Empress had given in honor of her son's departure from Vienna. Joseph was about to visit France, and his lovely young sister was once more to hear the sound of a beloved voice from home.

It was long past midnight, but the Hotel Esterhazy was one blaze of light. It had been one of the Countess's first orders to her steward that at dusk every chandelier in her palace should be lighted. She hated night and darkness, she said, and must have hundreds of wax lights burning from twilight until morning. This was one of the whims of the fair Margaret, which, although it amused all Vienna, was anything but comic to her husband, for it cost him one thousand florins a month.

The Hotel then, from ground-floor to attic, was bright as noon-day.—Six lackeys, in silvered livery, stood on either side of the entrance with torches in their hands, to light their lady to the vestibule. From the inner door to the stair-case, a rich Turkey carpet covered the floor, and here again, stood twelve more lackeys, performing the office of candelabra to the light-loving Countess. At the foot of the stairs, stood the steward and the butler of the household, awaiting such orders as she might choose to fling at them on her way; and at the head of the stairs, waiting to receive her, stood a bevy of *dames de compagnie*, and other female attendants.

The Countess passed through this living throng without vouchsafing one glance in acknowledgement of their respectful greetings. In profound silence she swept up the stair-way; her long, glossy train of white satin, following her as she went, like the flaming track that a ship leaves upon the broad bosom of the ocean, and the diamonds, that decked her

brow, neck and arms, flinging showers of radiance that dazzled the eye like lightning when the storm is at its height. Her head was thrown back, her large black eyes were starry as ever, and her face was so pale that its pallor was unearthly.

At the landing-place she turned, and speaking to the steward, said :

"Let Count Esterhazy know that in ten minutes I await him in the blue-room." Having said thus much, she continued her way, and disappeared from the eyes of her staring household.

Her disappearance was the signal for the transformation of the candelabra into men.

"Did you hear her?" whispered one. "She has sent for the Count."

"Never troubling herself whether he sleeps or wakes," said another. "Poor man! He has been in bed for four hours."

"No wonder he goes to bed early," remarked a third. "It is the only place on earth where he has peace."

"Nevertheless, he will be obedient and come. He dare not refuse."

"Oh, no!" was the general response. "In ten minutes he will be there, or his amiable Countess will treat us to a scene where she flings handfuls of gold out of the windows, and gathers all the people in Vienna before the Hotel to see the show."

The servants were right; Count Esterhazy did not disobey his wife. He trembled when he received her message, called nervously for his valet to dress him, and at the end of the ten minutes, was on his way to the blue room.

The Countess was there before him, looking like an angry Queen about to condemn a recreant vassal to death. And Esterhazy, with the mien and gait of a culprit, came into her presence with a bow that was almost a genuflexion.

"You see, Countess," said he, "with what haste I obey your commands. I feel so honored at the call that——"

He paused—for really her fiery eyes seemed to burn him, and her contempt dried up the stream of his common-place flattery, as the breath of the Sirocco parches up the dew-drop.

"Why do you not go on?" said she.

"I am bewildered by my own joy," replied he, blandly. "Remember—it is the first time since our marriage that you have allowed me the privilege of an interview in private; and I may well lose my speech in the intoxication of such a moment."

"It is the first time. You have a good memory. Can you also recollect how long it is since we had that interview?"

"Can I recollect! Four long years!"

"Four long years," sighed she, "to the day, and almost to the hour."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Count. "And can you forgive me for having forgotten this charming anniversary?"

"You are happy to have tasted of the Lethe of indifference. I—I have counted the days and the hours of my slavery, and each day and hour

is branded upon my heart. Have you forgotten, too, Count Esterhazy, what I swore to you on that wedding-night?"

"Yes, Margaret—I have forgotten all the cruel words you spoke to me in an outburst of just indignation."

"I wonder that you should have forgotten them, for it has been my daily care to remind you of the vow I then made. Have I not kept my word? Have I not crossed your path with the burning ploughshares of my hatred? Have I not cursed your home, wasted your wealth, and made you the laughing-stock of all Vienna?"

"You judge yourself with too much severity, Margaret," said the Count, mildly. "True,—we have not been very happy, since this is the first time, since our marriage-night, that we are face to face without witnesses. I will not deny either that our household expenditures have cost several millions, and have greatly exceeded our income. But the lovely Countess Esterhazy has a right to exceed all other women in the splendor of her concerts and balls, and the richness of her dress. Come, make me amends for the past—I forgive you. There is still time to—"

"No!" exclaimed she, "the time went by four years ago. You can never make amends to *me* nor I to *you*. Look at yourself. You were then a young man, with high hopes and a light heart. Many a woman would have been proud to be called your wife—and yet you chose *me*. Now, that four years of accursed wedded life have gone over your head, you have passed from youth to old age, without ever having known an interval of manhood. And I—oh, God! What have I become through your miserable cowardice! I might have grown to be a gentle woman, had fate united me to him whom I love; but the link that has bound me to you has unsexed me. Our marriage was a crime, and we have paid its penalty; *you* are as weak as a woman, and *I*—as inflexible as a man."

Two large tears glittered in her eyes, and fell slowly down her pale cheeks. Count Esterhazy approached and caressed her with his hands. She shuddered at his touch, recoiling as if from contact with a reptile. Meanwhile, he was imploring her to begin a new life with him—to give him her hand, to make him the happiest of men.

"No, no, no!" cried she. "In mercy cease, or you will drive me mad. But I will forgive you even your past treachery, if you will grant the request I am about to make."

"You will condescend to ask something of me! Speak, Margaret, speak. What can I do to make you happy?"

"You can give me my freedom," replied the Countess, in a soft, imploring voice. "Go with me to the Empress, and beg her to undo what she has done. Tell her that she has blasted the lives of two human beings—tell her that we are two galley-slaves, pining for liberty."

Count Esterhazy shook his head. "The Empress will never allow us to be divorced," said he, "for I have too often assured her that I was happy beyond expression, and she would not believe me if I came with another story."

"Then let us go to the fountain-head," said the Countess, wringing her hands. "Let us go to the Pope and implore him to loose the bands of our mutual misery."

"Impossible. That would be a slight which the Empress never would forgive. I should fall under her displeasure."

"Oh, these servile hearts that have no life but that which they borrow from the favor of Princes!" cried Margaret, scornfully. "What has the favor of the Empress been worth to you? For what have you to thank her? For these four years of martyrdom, which you have spent with a woman who despises you?"

"I cannot dispense with the good will of my sovereign," said the Count, with something like fervor. "For hundreds of years, the Esterhazys have been the favorites of the Emperors of Austria, and we cannot afford to lose the station we enjoy therefrom. No—I will do nothing to irritate the Empress. She chose you for my wife, and therefore, I wear my chains patiently. Maria Theresa knows how I have obeyed and honored her commands, and one of these days, I shall reap the reward of my loyalty. If Count Palfy dies, I am to be Marshal of the Imperial household; but yet higher honors await us both. If I continue to deserve the favor of the Empress, she will confer upon me the title of 'Prince.' You refuse to be my wife, Margaret, but you will one day be proud to let me deck that haughty brow with the coronet of a Princess."

Margaret looked more contemptuously at him than before.

"You are even more degraded than I had supposed," said she. "Poor, crawling reptile, I do not even pity you. I ask you, for the last time, will you go with me to Rome to obtain a divorce?"

"Why do you repeat your unreasonable request, Margaret? It is vain for you to hope for a divorce. Waste my fortune if you will—I cannot hinder you—I will find means to repair my losses; and the Empress, herself, will come to my assistance, for——"

"Enough," interrupted the Countess. "Since you will not aid me in procuring our divorce, it shall be forced upon you. I will draw across your escutcheon such a bar sinister as your princely coronet will not be large enough to hide. That is my last warning to you. Now leave me."

"Margaret I implore you to forgive me if I cannot make this great sacrifice. I cannot part from you, indeed, I cannot," began the Count.

"And the Empress will reward your constancy with the title of Prince," replied Margaret, with withering scorn. "Go—you are not worthy of my anger—but I shall know where to strike. Away with you."

Count Esterhazy, with a deep sigh, turned and left the room.

"The last hope to which I clung, has vanished!" said she, "and I must resort to disgrace."

She bent her head, and a shower of tears came to her relief. But they did not soften her heart. She rose from her seat muttering, "It is

too late to weep! I have no alternative. The hour for revenge has struck!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE FLIGHT.

THE Countess passed into her dressing-room. She closed and locked the door, then going across the room, she stopped before a large picture that hung opposite to her rich Venetian toilet-mirror. The frame of this picture was ornamented with small gilt rosettes. Margaret laid her hand upon one of these rosettes and drew it towards her. A noise of machinery was heard behind the wall. She drew down the rosette a second time, and then stepped back. The whirr was heard again, the picture began to move, and behind it appeared a secret door. Margaret opened it and as she did so, her whole frame shook as if with a deadly repugnance to that which was within.

"I am here, Count Schulenberg," said she coldly.

The figure of a young man appeared at the door-way.

"May I presume to enter Paradise?" said he, stepping into the room with a flippant air.

"You may," replied she, without moving; but the hue of shame overspread her face, neck and arms, and it was plain to Count Schulenberg that she trembled violently.

These were to him the signals of his triumph, and he smiled with satisfaction as he surveyed this lovely woman, so long acknowledged to be the beauty *par excellence* of the imperial court at Vienna. Margaret allowed him to take her hand, and stood coldly passive, while he covered it with kisses; but when he would have gone further, and put his arm around her waist, she raised her hands, and receded.

"Not here,"—murmured she hoarsely. "Not here, in the house of the man whose name I bear. Let us not desecrate love; enough that we defile marriage."

"Come, then, beloved, come," said he imploringly. "The coach is at the door, and I have passes for France, Italy, Spain and England. Choose yourself the spot wherein we shall bury our love from the world's gaze."

"We go to Paris," replied she, turning away her head.

"To Paris, dearest? Why you have forgotten that the Emperor leaves for Paris to-morrow, and that we incur the risk of recognition there."

"Not at all—Paris is a large city, and if we are discovered I shall seek protection from the Emperor. He knows of my unhappy marriage and sympathises with my sorrows."

"Perhaps you are right, dearest. Then in Paris, we spend our honeymoon, and there enjoy the bliss of requited love."

"There, and not until we reach there," said she gravely. "I require a last proof of your devotion, Count. I exact that until we arrive in Paris you shall not speak to me of love. You shall consider me as a sister, and allow me the privilege of travelling in the carriage with my maid—she and I on one seat, you opposite."

"Margaret that is abominable tyranny. You expect me to be near you and not to speak of love! I must be watched by your maid, and sit opposite to you!—You surely cannot mean what you say."

"I do indeed, Count Schulenberg."

"But think of all that I have endured for a year that I have adored you, cold Beauty! Not one single proof of love have you ever given me yet. You have tolerated mine, but have never returned it."

"Did I not write to you?"

"Write! yes. You wrote me to say that you would not consent to be mine unless I carried you away from Vienna. Then you went on to order our mode of travelling as you would have done had I been your husband. 'Be here at such an hour; have your passes for various countries. Describe me therein as your sister. Come through the garden and await me at the head of the secret stair-way.' Is this a love-letter? It is a mere note of instructions. For one week I have waited for a look, a sigh, a pressure of the hand; and when I come hither to take you from your home forever, you receive me as if I were a courier. No, Margaret, no—I will not wait to speak my love until we are in Paris."

"Then, Count Schulenberg, farewell. We have nothing more to say to one another."

She turned to leave the room, but Schulenberg darted forward and fell at her feet. "Margaret, beloved," cried he, "give me one single word of comfort. I thirst to know that you love me."

"Can a woman go further than I am going at this moment?" asked Margaret, with a strange, hollow laugh.

"No. I acknowledge my unspeakable happiness in being the partner of your flight. But I cannot comprehend your love. It is a bitter draught in a golden beaker."

"Then do not drink it," said she, retreating.

"I must—I must drink it; for my soul thirsts for the cup, and I will accept its contents."

"My conditions?"

"Yes, since I must," said Schulenberg heaving a sigh, "I promise then to contain my ecstasy until we reach Paris, and to allow that guardian of virtue, your maid, to sit by your side, while I suffer agony opposite. But oh! when we reach Paris——"

"In Paris we will talk further, and my speech shall be different."

"Thank you, beloved," cried the Count passionately. "This heavenly promise will sustain me through my ordeal." He kissed the tips of her fingers and she retired to change her ball-dress for a travelling habit.

When she had closed the door, the expression of Count Schulenberg's face was not quite the same.

"The fierce Countess is about to be tamed," thought he. "I shall win my bet, and will humble this insolent beauty. Let her rule if she must, until we reach Paris, but there I will repay her, and her chains shall not be light. Really this is a piquant adventure. I am making a delightful wedding-tour without the bore of the marriage-ceremony, at the expense of the most beautiful woman in Europe; and to heighten the piquancy of the affair, I am to receive two thousand louis d'ors on my return to Vienna. Here she comes."

"I am ready," said Margaret, coming in, followed by her maid who held her mistress's travelling-bag.

Count Schulenberg darted forward to offer his arm, but she waved him away.

"Follow me," said she, passing at once through the secret opening. Schulenberg followed, "sighing like a furnace," and looking daggers at the confidante, who in her turn looked sneeringly at him. A few moments after, they entered the carriage. The windows of the hotel Esterhazy were as brilliantly illuminated as ever, while the master of the house slumbered peacefully. And yet a shadow had fallen upon the proud escutcheon which surmounted the silken curtains of his luxurious bed. The shadow of that disgrace with which his outraged wife had threatened him!

CHAPTER LIX.

JOSEPH IN FRANCE.

A LONG train of travelling carriages was about to cross the bridge which spans the Rhine at Strasburg, and separates Germany from France. It was the suite of the Count of Falkenstein who was on his way to visit his royal sister.

Thirty persons, exclusive of Count Rosenberg and two other confidential friends, accompanied the Emperor. Of course the incognito of a Count of Falkenstein, who travelled with such a suite, was not of much value to him; so that he had endured all the tedium of an official jour-

ney. This was all very proper in the eyes of Maria Theresa who thought it impossible for Jove to travel without his thunder; but Jove himself, as everybody knows, was much addicted to incognitos, and so was his terrine representative, the Emperor of Austria.

The imperial cortège, then, was just about to pass from Germany to France. It was evening, and the fiery gold of the setting sun was mirrored in the waves of the Rhine which with gentle murmur were toying with the greensward that sloped gracefully down to the water's edge. The Emperor gave the word to halt, and rising from his seat, looked back upon the long line of carriages that followed in his wake.

"Rosenberg," said he, laying his hand upon the Count's shoulder, "tell me frankly, how do you enjoy this way of travelling?"

"Ah, sire, I have been thinking all day of the delights of our other journeys. Do you remember our hunt for dinner in the dirty little hamlet, and the nights we spent on horseback in Galicia? There was no monotony in travelling then!"

"Thank you, thank you," said the Emperor with a bright smile. "I see that we are of one mind."

He motioned to the occupants of the carriage immediately behind him, and they hastened to obey the signal.

The Emperor after thanking them for the manner in which they had acquitted themselves of their respective duties, proposes a change in their plans of travel.

"Then," replied Herr Von Bourgeois, with a sigh, "your Majesty has no further use for us, and we return to Vienna."

"Not at all, not at all," said the Emperor, who had heard and understood the sigh wafted towards Paris and its thousand attractions. "We will only part company that we may travel more at our ease, and once in Paris, we again join forces. Be so good as to make your arrangements accordingly, and to make my adieux to the other gentlemen of our suite."

Not long after, the imperial cortège separated into three columns, each one of which was to go independent of the other, and all to unite when they had reached Paris. As the last of the carriages with which he had parted, disappeared on the other side of the bridge, the Emperor drew a long breath and looked radiant with satisfaction.

"Let us wait," said he, "until the dust of my imperial magnificence is laid, before we cross the bridge to seek lodgings for the night. Meanwhile, Rosenberg, give me your arm and let us walk along the banks of the Rhine."

They crossed the high-road and took a foot-path that led to the banks of the river. At that evening hour every thing was peaceful and quiet. Now and then a peasant came slowly following his hay-laden wagon, and occasionally some village-girl caroled a love-lay, or softly murmured a vesper hymn.

The Emperor who had been walking fast, suddenly stopped, and gazed with rapture upon the scene.

"See, Rosenberg," said he, "see how beautiful Germany is to-day! As beautiful as a laughing youth upon whose brow is stamped the future hero!"

"Your Majesty will transform the boy into a hero," said Rosenberg.

The Emperor frowned. "Let us forget for a moment the mummery of royalty," said he. "You know moreover that royalty has brought me nothing but misery. Instead of reigning over others, I am continually passing under the Caudine forks of another's despotic will."

"But the day will come when the Emperor shall reign alone, and then the sun of greatness will rise for Germany."

"Heaven grant it! I have the will to make of Germany one powerful empire. Oh, that I had the power, too! My friend, we are alone, and no one hears except God. Here on the confines of Germany the poor unhappy Emperor may be permitted to shed a tear over the severed garment of German royalty—that garment which has been rent by so many little princes! Have you observed, Rosenberg, how they have soiled its majesty? Have you noticed the pretensions of these manikins whose domains we can span with our hands? Is it not pitiable that each one in his principality is equal in power to the Emperor of Austria!"

"Yes, indeed," said Rosenberg with a sigh, "Germany swarms with little princes!"

"Too many little princes," echoed Joseph, "and therefore their lord and emperor is curtailed by so much of his own lawful rights, and Germany is an empty name among nations! If the Germans were capable of an enlightened patriotism, if they would throw away their Anglomania, Gallomania, Prussomania, and Austromania, they would be something more than the feeble echoes of intriguers and pedants.* Each one thrusts his own little province forward, while all forget the one great fatherland!"

"But the Emperor Joseph will be lord of all Germany," cried Rosenberg exultingly, "and he will remind them that they are vassals and he is their Suzerain!"

"They must have a bloody lesson to remind them of that," said the Emperor, moodily. "Look behind you, Rosenberg, on the other side of the Rhine. There lies a kingdom neither larger nor more populous than Germany—a kingdom which rules us by its industry and its caprices, and is great by reason of its unity, because its millions of men are under the sway of one monarch."

"And yet it was once with France as it is to-day with Germany," said Count Rosenberg. "There were Normandy, Brittany, Provence, Languedoc, Bourgoyne and Franche-Comté, all petty dukedoms striving against their allegiance to the king. Where are their rulers now? Buried and forgotten, while their provinces own the sway of the one monarch who rules all France. What France has accomplished, Germany, too, can compass."

*The Emperor's own words. See Joseph II correspondence, p. 175.

The Emperor placed his hand affectionately upon Rosenberg's shoulder. "You have read my heart, friend," said he smiling. "Do you know what wild wishes are surging within me now? Wishes which Frederick of Prussia would condemn as unlawful, although it was quite righteous for him to rob Austria of Silesia. I too have my Silesia, and by the Lord above me! my title-deeds are not as mouldy as his!"

"Only that your Silesia is called Bavaria," said Rosenberg with a significant smile.

"For God's sake," cried Joseph, "do not let the rushes hear you, lest they betray me to the babbling wind, and the wind bear it to the King of Prussia. But you have guessed. Bavaria is a *portion* of my Silesia, but only a portion. Bavaria is mine by right of inheritance, and I shall take it when the time comes. It will be a comely patch to stop some of the rents in my imperial mantle. But my Silesia lies at every point of the compass. To the east lie Bosnia and Servia—to the south see superannuated Venice. The lion of St. Marks is old and blind and will fall an easy prey to the eagle of Hapsburg. This will extend our dominions to the Adriatic sea. When the Duke of Modena is gathered to his fathers, my brother, in right of his wife, succeeds to the title, and as Ferrara once belonged to the House of Modena, he and I together, can easily wrest it from the Pope. Close by are the Tortonese and Alessandria, two fair provinces which the King of Sardinia supposes to be his. *They* once formed a portion of the Duchy of Milan, and Milan is ours, with every acre of land that ever belonged to it. By heaven, I will have all that is mine, if it cost me a seven year's war to win it back! This is not all. Look towards the west, beyond the spires of Strasburg, where the green and fertile plains of Alsatia woo our coming. They now belong to France, but they *shall* be the property of Austria. Further on lies Lorraine. That too is mine, for my father's title was 'Duke of Lorraine.' What is it to me that Francis the First sold his birthright to France! All that I covet I shall annex to Austria, as surely as Frederic wrested Silesia from me."

"And do you intend to let him keep possession of Silesia?" asked Rosenberg.

"Not if I can prevent it, but that may not be optional with me. I will—but hush! Let us speak no more of the future, my soul faints with thirst when I think of it. Sometimes I think I see Germany pointing to her many wounds, and calling me to come and heal her lacerated body. And yet I can do nothing! I must stand with folded arms, nor wish that I were lord of Austria, for God knows that I do not long for Maria Theresa's death. May she reign for many years, but oh! may I live to see the day wherein I shall be sole monarch not only of Austria, but of all Germany. If it ever dawns for me, the provinces shall no longer speak each one its own language. Italians, Hungarians and Austrians, all shall be German, and we shall have one people and one tongue. To ensure the prosperity of my empire, I will strengthen my alliance with France. I dislike the French, but I must secure their neu-

trality before I step into possession of Bavaria, and assert my claims to my many-sided Silesia. Well—these are dreams; day has not yet dawned for me! The future Emperor of Germany is yet a vassal, and he who goes to France to-day is nothing but a Count of Falkenstein.—Come let us cross the bridge that at once unites France with Germany, and divides them one from another.”*

CHAPTER LX.

THE GODFATHER.

THERE was great commotion at the post-house of the little town of Vitry. Two maids in their Sunday best were transforming the public parlor of the inn into a festive dining-room, wreathing the walls with garlands, decking the long dining-table with flowers, and converting the huge dresser into a *buffet* whereon they deposited the pretty gilt china, the large cakes, the pastries, jellies, and confections that were destined for the entertainment of thirty invited guests. The landlord and post-master, a slender little man with an excellent, good-humored face, was hurrying from *buffet* to table, from table to kitchen, superintending the servants. The cook was deep in the preparation of her roasts and warm dishes, and at the kitchen door sat a little maiden, who with important mien, was selecting the whitest and crispest leaves from a mountain of lettuce which she laid into a large gilt salad-bowl beside her, throwing the others to a delighted pig, who, like Lazarus, stood by to pick up the leavings of his betters. In the yard, at the fountain, stood the man-of-all-work, who, as butler *pro tem.*, was washing plates and glasses, while closely on the flags, sat the clerk of the post-office polishing and uncorking the bottles which the host had just brought from the cellar in honor of his friends.

Monsieur Etienne surveyed his notes of preparation and gave an approving nod. His face was radiant as he returned to the house, gave another glance of satisfaction around the dining-room, and passed into an adjoining apartment. This was the best furnished room in the post-house; and on a soft lounge, near the window, reclined a pale young woman, beautifully dressed, whose vicinity to a cradle, where lay a very young infant, betokened her recent recovery from confinement.

“Athanasia, my goddess,” said Monsieur Etienne, coming in on tip-toe, “how do you feel to-day?”

She reached out her pale hand and answered in a languid voice: “The

* These are Joseph's own words. See Letters of Joseph II. Page 175.

doctor says that, so far, I am doing pretty well, and by great precautions, I may be able, in a few weeks, to resume my household duties."

Monsieur Etienne raised his eyebrows, and looked thoughtful. "The doctor is over-anxious my dear," said he, "he exaggerates your weakness. Our little angel there, is already three weeks old, and will be standing on his legs before long."

"The doctor is more sympathising than you, Monsieur Etienne," began the wife.

"My treasure," interrupted her husband, "no one can wish to spare you premature exertion more than I. But I do entreat of you, my angel, to do your best to remain with the company to-day as long as you can."

"I will do all in my power to oblige you," said Madame Etienne, condescendingly, "and if you require it, I will set up from first to last."

"It will be a great festival for us, provided no passengers arrive to-day. Good heavens! if they should come, what could I do with them? Even the best of those we receive here are scarcely fit to introduce among our respectable guests; and then as for post-horses, I want every one of them for the company. Heaven defend us then from passengers, for—oh! oh! is it possible! Can it be!"—said Etienne, interrupting himself. "Yes, it is the sound of a post-horn."

"Perhaps it is some of our guests," suggested Madame Etienne.

"No, no, for our postillions to-day play but one air, '*Je suis père, un père heureux*,'" said Monsieur Etienne, listening with all his might to the approaching horn.

"It is a passenger," said he, despondingly. "Athanasia, my angel, we are lost!"

So saying, Monsieur Etienne darted out of the room, as if he were rushing off to lose himself without delay; but he stopped as soon as he had reached his front door, for there was no necessity to go further. A dark *calèche*, with three horses, dashed up to the door, while not far behind, came another chaise, whose post-horn was sounding "*Je suis un père, un père heureux*."

"Is it possible?" thought the discomfited post-master. "Yes,—here they come at the very moment when the guests are arriving."

Just then another horn was heard, and "*Je suis un père, un père heureux*," made the welkin ring.

On every side they came, but the unlucky passenger *calèche* blocked up the passage. Monsieur Etienne, following the impulses of his heart, rushed past the strangers, and ran to greet the most important of his guests, the village-curate and the pastor of the next market-place. But just then, the bewildered little man remembered his duty, and darted back to the passengers.

There were two gentlemen in the carriage, and on the box, near the postillion, a third, who had the air of a valet.

"The gentlemen wish to go on to the next stage?" said Etienne, without opening the door.

"No, sir," said one of the passengers, raising his dark blue eyes to the post-house. "Your house looks inviting, and we would like a room and a cosy dinner."

Monsieur Etienne scarcely knew what reply to make to this untimely request. "You wish to dine here—here—you would——"

Down came another post-chaise, thundering on the stones, and louder than ever was the sound of "*Je suis un père, un père heureux.*"

Certainly at that moment the song was a mockery, for Monsieur Etienne was a most unhappy and distracted father.

"Gentlemen," said he, pathetically, "oblige me by going on to the next town. Indeed I——"

"Why, will you not give us dinner?" asked the gentleman who had spoken before. "I see a number of people passing us and entering the house. How is that?"

"Sir, they are—that is—I am,"—stammered the landlord; then suddenly plunging into a desperate resolve, he said: "Are you a father?"

A shade passed over the stranger's face as he replied, "I *have* been a father. But why such a question?"

"Oh, if you have been a father," answered Etienne, "you will sympathise with me when I tell you that to-day we christen our first-born child."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the passenger, with a kind smile. "Then these persons are——"

"My guests," interrupted the landlord and post-master, "and you will know how to excuse me if——"

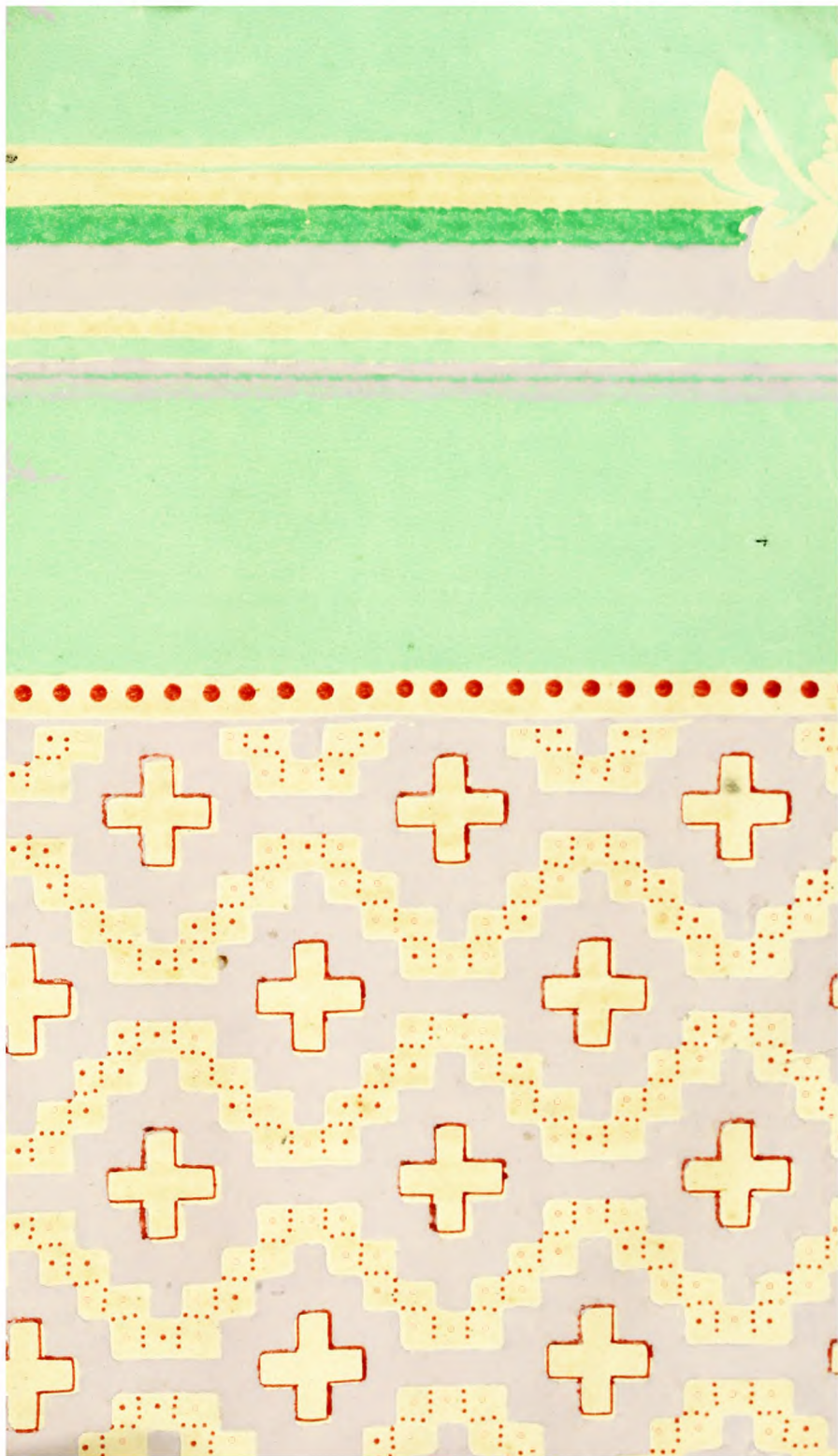
"If you wish us to the devil," returned the blue-eyed stranger, laughing merrily. "But indeed, I cannot oblige you, my excellent friend, for I don't know where his Infernal Majesty is to be found, and if I may be allowed a preference, I would rather remain in the society of the two priests whom I see going into your house."

"You will not go further then——"

"Oh, no, we ask to be allowed to join your guests and attend the christening. The baptism of a first-born child is a ceremony which touches my heart. And yours, also, does it not?" said the stranger to his companion.

"Certainly," replied the other, laughing, "above all, when it is joined to another interesting ceremony—that of a good dinner."

"Oh, you shall have a good dinner!" cried Etienne, won over by the sympathy of the first speaker. "Come in, gentlemen, come in. As the guests of our little son, you are welcome."



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